

Makers of Indian Literature

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The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From: Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.
Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi.

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Translation
N. Gopalakrishnan



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(Attoor Ravi Varma)

The twentieth century was an era of social and cultural renaissance in Kerala. Till the very end of the nineteenth century the rural farm-based culture rooted in the feudal order and the caste system was altogether stagnant. It was only early in the twentieth century that ideas like freedom, equality and upliftment of the oppressed classes that had gained universal popularity in the West after the French Revolution and the rise of Marxism percolated into the thoughts and actions of the people of Kerala. A number of struggles for political social and economic freedom took place in Kerala in the twentieth century. Many were successful. Some failed. Nevertheless society came to acquire an element of dynamism and a great deal of change did take place.

At the political level as a sequel to India's independence, one might say, the united Kerala state came into being in 1956. Thus people whose mother tongue is Malayalam got a state of their own. At the social level organizations and movements that strove to bring about changes in keeping with the times sprang up among all castes. These movements and organizations which were forward looking to start with and which fought against archaic and outdated customs and

practices soon got caught in the political swirl and in a process of reverse evolution became mere pressure groups and vote banks. However, by the time the century reached its last decade, the farmer, the labourer and the oppressed classes had realized their relevance to society and learned to stand up for their rights. The feudal system with its petty-minded landlordism became a thing of the past. The tiller became the owner of the land on which he laboured. The worker assumed a respectable role in the productive process. Education became universal. The citizens' entitlement to healthcare gained acceptance. Things are again changing pretty fast with the onslaught of globalization. But here we won't go into that.

The twentieth century, except perhaps for the last two or three decades was a period of hope and activities that centered on human well being under the leadership of the progressive forces. Malayalam literature that reflects the society of Kerala too made substantial progress. The literature consisted mainly of poetry till O. Chandu Menon wrote his novel Indulekha (1889). Today prose writing has a place in Malayalam that is as important as if not more important than that of poetry. The vast scope and high quality that prose writing in Malayalam attained in the span of just one century places it at par with the literatures of world languages. So, for Malayalam the twentieth century is the century of prose.

For Malayalam poetry too, the twentieth century was a period of progress by leaps and bounds. The way followed by most of the neoclassical poets of the nineteenth century was that of dusting and polishing well - known epics and presenting them in stanzas or couplets with symbols and literary embellishments of widely accepted categories. Those who were able to impart a little uniqueness and originality

to their style of expression came to be known as great poets. For poets in those days, the creation of poetry was little more than a part of having a good time spent in pleasant chatting with friends after a good meal followed by pan. After the days of the handful of great poets of exceptional merit like Ezhuthachchan, Poonthanam, Ramapurath Warrier and Unnai Warrier it was only in Kumaran Asan (1873-1924) that Malayalam poetry attained its true dignity and loftiness. For Asan poetry had nothing to do with after dinner gossip and chit chatting. It was the unveiling of his soul that was riddled with problems. The heroines of his famous works like Nalini, Leela and Karuna were themselves representative of the dualities of the poet's inner self. Asan's ideal was asceticism. Yet he had an abiding love of life. Though he says that true love is beyond flesh, the lure of the flesh is clearly visible between the lines of not only his poetry but also of his life. Love and asceticism, sex and asexuality, the body and the soul enact a drama of constant conflict on the stage that is Asan's life and poetry. Asan solves this problem in his poetry by sublimating the love between man and woman into universal love. However, in his life the problem remained unsolved.

Vallathol (1878-1958) was a great poet who reveled in the beauty of nature and took pride in India's heritage. It was through Vallathol's poems that the Malayali learned to savour Kerala's natural environment that underwent kaleidoscopic transformations not only with the change of seasons but also with the passage of the hours of the day and the night. Vallathol was proud of the ancient national culture. This made him all the more unhappy about the domination of the country by foreigners. He dreamt of an India that was firmly rooted in wisdom and moral strength free from the conflicts of religion and caste. This was the inspiration behind his poems that brim with patriotism. The

dominant moods of his poetry are of sensuality, ecstasy and self-respect. Beauty is his deity and straight forwardness and transparency his hallmark.

Changampuzha Krishna Pillai (1912-1948) was a poet who lived by the moment. In a short life of thirty-six years he created a world of his own in Malayalam poetry. He was a romanticist through and through. Hence we do not come across visionary constancy, universality or continuity in his poems. Seeing himself as well as his world from a totally emotional point of view he immersed himself and his world in the glorious moments of his creative endeavour. Hence the reader gets sucked into his poetry. Spellbound he is enslaved by the musical sweetness. Each moment is an experience by itself. Each experience touches the reader to the quick. But because of the absence of a composite view of life that integrates experience and gives it a total meaning, Changampuzha's poetry fails to awaken or elevate the reader intellectually or culturally. Like a drop of honey on the tongue it melts away at the very moment of contact. Blissful sweetness for a moment. Afterwards .... afterwards nothing.

G. Sankara Kurup's (1901-1978) poetry invokes the image of a worshipful devotee at the portals of the temple that is the Universe itself, his hands folded in devotion and his eyes streaming with tears of joy. In profound wonderment he beholds the phenomena of nature and assumes oneness with them. The Universe that fills time and space that are boundless and the timeless cosmic power that created it and keeps it going floods the poet's mind with wonder and veneration. Thus it is that G. became a votary of nature. Nature for G. is not an inanimate object. It is ever in motion. Man is a mere part of nature. Seeing him strutting about as if he were the emperor of the universe, the poet is pained. He is angry. The poet tells us that what nature teaches us is love, sacrifice, equanimity and humility.

Deeply absorbing these lessons, the poet in his later years wrote poems in which the salient mood was of freedom and love of mankind.

Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon (1911-1985) was a poet who gave expression to the close tie not only between man and nature but also between man and man, in a style that was uniquely his own. He laid trust on man's will and activism. When man comprehends natural phenomena and puts them to use for his pleasure, nature too rejoices and finds fulfillment. One of his problems was how nature and man would subsist providing wellbeing and happiness to each other. He was also a poet who held a meaningful dialogue with the society and the times in which he lived. He is the only poet who wrote creatively about the conflict in the forties of the last century between the landed gentry and the farmers of Kerala, with sympathy for the working class, but never once losing sight of realities. We see this in his famous work Kudiyozhikkal (Eviction). He was able to present a clear view of the excessive politicization, bureaucratic authoritarianism, rampant corruption, reckless deforestation and the sad plight of the aboriginals, without in any way diluting their complexities by facile simplifications. (Mritasanjeevani – Life Restoring Elixir) In short Vyloppilli was a poet who while analyzing his intimate relationship with nature was able with deep insight, to transform the realities of the society in which he lived into direct experience.

The poetry of Edasseri (1906-1974) with its strong sense of realism is altogether different from that of Changampuzha. At a time when the flag of romanticism flew high in Malayalam literature, Edasseri living in his village of Ponnani depicted the realities of the world in his unsophisticated style. His was not a mind that flitted from moment to moment. It took a comprehensive view of the life

in the countryside in its Dravidian authenticity. A notable feature of Edasseri's poetry that enriched it was its dramaticism. He depicted in a detached but dramatic way the tortuous process by which a village evolved into a town and the pristine beauty of the village slowly vanished, man becoming more and more selfish and human relations being rent apart. He understood and analyzed in depth the basic dualisms that motivate human conduct – cruelty - compassion, love - sacrifice, Dharma - Power. The poet who, possibly because of the prevalent strong presence of romanticism, did not receive the attention that he deserved while he was alive is now going through a process of resurrection in the minds of the new generation.

The poetic world of the twentieth century was illuminated by the presence of these eminent poets who are no longer with us and of others like Akitham, Balamani Amma* and many others who are still with us, but have not been mentioned here by name. There is no other period in the history of Malayalam poetry that was marked by such abundance and excellence of poetic works.

There is yet another poet without considering whom no discussion on the poetic literature of the twentieth century Malayalam will be complete. This is none other than P. Kunjiraman Nair. Born in Kanjangad in northern Kerala in 1906 he died in Thiruvananthapuram in south Kerala in1978. Affectionately called P., he was a poet through and through. For P. life was poetry and poetry life. Attoor Ravi Varma's description of P. as "The spurned lover who wanders hearkening for the jingle of forgotten bangles" was no mere figuration. Truly he was wandering all over Kerala in search of his muse.

The atmosphere created by P's poetry is richly magical

* Balamani Amma passed away in 2004.

with the captivating presence of nature, festivals, and temples. It ever brims with sweet nostalgia. He was perhaps the first poet in Malayalam to make use of abstract imagery. What he does through his poetry is to enliven nature by imputing human character to natural phenomena. Also ever present in his poetry is the undertone of vague guilt and regret about wrongs that he believed he had perpetrated on unidentified or unidentifiable people. Even while regretting, the inclination to continue in the same errant path persists, the poet making a sacrificial offering of himself. He views this life on earth as a small part of the endless sojourn of the soul through a continuum of births and deaths. Much has gone before and more is to come. Hence even while leading a life immersed in sensuality, he was able to maintain an elevated spiritual stance in his poems. The Kerala of P's dreams was an egalitarian society free from caste and creed. That is what he tries to depict in the many poems that he wrote with festivals like Onam as the background.

The poet succumbed to innumerable temptations in the course of his wanderings in his search for poetry that he regarded as the goddess of beauty. He could not help inflicting great pain on his parents and the members of his family. Yet he was never able to put an end to his wanderings. In the course of his peregrinations he wrote thousands of poems. Many were lost. Many poems published in journals have not been retrieved. We have with us some fifty collections and five long poems. Besides these we have three songs, five collections of articles, twenty-six plays, fifteen stories, three autobiographical books and six biographies. All said and done, P. was a poet first and last and in a way his prose writings are poems too.

An outline of the Poet's life

With the resonance of spring in his words,
In grand efflorescence P rose
To become the great tree of the nether world
The Mahabali of words.

(K.G.Sankara Pillai)

He was born in a family that had money and prestige. He grew up as the darling of his parents. He was blessed by the muse. But the goddess of wealth rejected and humiliated him. He loved nature and poetry all his life. He fell into the trap of female charm, muddling it with poetry. He deeply regretted his mistakes and yet committed them again and again. He spent his life as an expatriate and was a destitute when he left the world.

P. Kunjiraman Nair was born on the 25th of October 1906 in the Adiyodi house near Kanjangad in the Kasargode district. The house belonged to the Panayamthatta family. His father was Puravankara Kunjambu Nair, an Ayurvedic physician and Sanskrit scholar. His mother was the noble and deeply religious Panayamthatta Kunjamma Amma. Kunjiraman Nair spent his childhood in his father's house at Vellikkoth. He had his basic education with local freelance teachers and at the primary school in Vellikkoth. Though he absorbed with alacrity the stories from mythology that his mother narrated and the poems she recited, he made little progress in formal education. He was no good at all in arithmetic. The son who neglected his education and indulged in allround mischief was a headache to the parents.

To straighten him out his father decided to send him to the Sanskrit school at Pattambi run by the famous Sanskrit scholar Punnasseri Nambi Neelakantha Sharma. As it turned out Kunjiraman Nair studied there for just a year and a half and returned home. He spent some time there learning Sanskrit and Ayurveda from local teachers. However, he returned to Pattambi at the age of thirteen and managed to stick around for five years though there were many intervals of truancy. It was during this time that he fell in love with the river Nila and the breathtaking beauty of nature along her path. The river Nila is also known as the Bharatapuzha. This love lasted all his life. P. has said many times that like the Ganga for Kalidas, the Godavari for Bhavabhooti and the Padma for Tagore, the Nila was his eternal love.

Quite early in his life P. started writing poetry. The first poem to be published was "Prakriti geetham" (The song of nature) which was printed in the magazine *Painkili*, published by Kuruvanthodi Sankaran Ezhuthachchan. P. was fourteen years of age when he wrote the poem. From then on it was a torrent of poetry. He spent all his time writing poems, often forgetting his school. Lost in dreams he wandered around Pattambi and its neighborhood.

Proximity to and occasional contacts with famous poets and writers like Ulloor, Vallathol, Nalappadan, Kuttikrishna Marar, Cheruliyil Kunjunni Nambeesan, K.V.M., Kuttippurathu Kesavan Nair, and Kallanmarthodi Ravunni Menon led to the rapid blooming of his talent.

He managed to get through the entrance examination for Siromani, the graduate course in Sanskrit and joined the classes. It was around this time that he fell in love with a young girl who was his class-mate. The heroine of his first love story was Kunjilakshmi Amma of the Vadayakkalam

House of Ponmala. The poet writes about his first meeting with his love.

"A morning in early summer, the moonlight still lingering. The fragrance of ripe mangoes in the air. She came in damp clothes from the temple pond after her bath, her dark luxuriant hair tied in a small knot at the end. There she stood on the porch with her eyes lined with a flourish with dark kohl, a bindi of sandalwood paste adorning her forehead. She tossed a blue lotus flower to me. I was standing on the balcony above. I had been reading Kalidas's *Kumarasambhavam*. Lord Siva in deep meditation saw the daughter of the king of mountains – the daughter of the king of mountains with a lotus flower held playfully in her hand. The gentle breeze with a new perfume. The glory of the honeyed spring." (*Kaviyude Kalpadukal* - Footprints of the poet pp. 149.)

In the intoxication of love he reeled out many poems. They have all been lost. The poet recalls in his autobiography how he recited a long poem about his love life titled Kuil (The Nightingale.) at a large gathering and received thunderous applause and how it was later published in the *Arunodaya*, the top-rung magazine of those days.

The love story became the talk of the town. It reached the ears of his parents. We have no way of knowing whether it was to escape from the entanglement or to evade cross examination by his parents that he quietly left Pattambi without sitting for the examination that was imminent. However, since he did want to learn Sanskrit he caught a train to Thanjavoor in Tamil Nadu.

"From the land of Thunchan where the Nila flows in the shade of coconut trees I reached the land of Kambar where the Kaveri waters vineyards. Soil like black gold. Vineyards, jungles of sugarcane, paddy fields that yielded gold, great temples.

The land of poet Kambar. The land of the great classic *Thirukkural* and the devotional songs of Thyagaraja that ooze with honey. Thanjavoor, the golden granary Tamil Nadu." (*Kaviyude Kalpadukal* pp.182.)

At the famous seat of Sanskrit learning he pursued higher studies in Vedanta, literature and grammar under scholars like Professor Vedantam Iyengar and Professor Chakravorthy Iyengar. But even there he did not complete his education. In any case, between Pattambi and Thanjavoor he studied Sanskrit for a total of twelve years. He could speak and write beautiful poems in Sanskrit effortlessly. But he never passed any examination. He took no degrees. What he did was to get up one morning and walk out with one of his friends. He reached Kerala. What we see next is P. staying in the young friend's house near Palakkad as his Sanskrit tutor. During this period he came into contact with the independence movement and was drawn to the ideas preached by Mahatma Gandhi. He made speeches at several meetings of the Indian National congress.

It was around this time that his first work in prose was published. In response to a request from Velayudhan Nair, the manager of the Sriramakrishnodayam Press near Olavakode he wrote a play titled *Charitraraksha* (Protection of Chastity.) It was a free rendering in Malayalam of *Ascharyachoodamani,* the famous Sanskrit drama by Sakthibhadra. P. has a unique way with Malayalam prose. It was in this work that he took his first steps along that path. The connoisseurs of Kerala including Ulloor, Vallathol and Chelanattu Achutha Menon congratulated and liberally praised P. for his work. It became a text-book for the students of Class X. Since P. had sold the rights to the publisher for a meager sum of a hundred rupees, the fact that the book ran into several editions of thousands of copies did not in any way benefit him. P. who like Dostoevsky sold

away the rights of his works for a pittance ever remained poor. The publishers became millionaires. He writes about how he had always been cheated by publishers.

"Publisher – the meaning of that word is butcher. Publisher's firm - butcher shop. He doesn't want poetry. He is not interested in the cow. He wants the meat. Money, Money. His poetry is in that. Stacks of currency notes – that is his art gallery.

The punishment that is meted out to the man who sells the cow that God gave him to the butcher and then lives on plain water, the farmer who sells his farm and spends the money in the liquor shop – you shall bear that punishment all your life. You will for ever struggle in poverty – the priest who breaks and sells the golden weapon of his deity.

Your thirst shall increase with every drop that you drink and your hunger grow with every morsel that you eat. Even as you receive the money from your sale of copyrights, penury will bare its teeth and mock you." (*Kaviyude Kalpadukal.* pp.200)

It was when he was living in Palakkad writing books for the Sriramakrishnodayam Press that he learned about the demise of his relative Vidwan P. Kelu Nair who was a famous dramatist and poet. Kelu Nair's death – it was a suicide – was a great blow to P. He left by the next available bus for Kanjangad. There he participated in all the ceremonies that were performed after the death. On his father's instruction he had to assume charge of the Sanskrit school that Kelu Nair had been running. During this period he organized the students and the people of the village to set up a village service society. Many progressive activities took place in the village under the auspices of the committee that was set up on a democratic basis. The villagers constructed new roads singing inspiring songs composed

by P. The plays written by P. during this period became popular in Northern Kerala.

Around this time P's father decided that P should marry Janaki Amma who was his niece. P did not have the courage to stand up to his father. At the same time he was unable to forget his love in Pattambi. P tackled this difficult situation in a way that was all his own. He took from his father the amount of five hundred rupees for purchasing ornaments for the bride and just vanished from the scene.

We see him next in Trichur. While in Trichur he translated in to Malayalam some ten plays written by Dwijendralal Roy for Bharatavilasam Press and Sundara Iyer & Sons. He also wrote a large number of poems which were published in popular periodicals like the *Kairali*. Apart from this he established friendship with poets like G. Sankara Kurup, K.K.Raja and Prof. Mundasseri.

In the meantime his feelings for his old love that were in a state of slumber revived. He longed to make his beloved his. That is how he came to move to Ottappalam. There, in a rented house where the sister and brother-in-law of the girl lived, he had what he describes as his first Kalyanamillatha Kalyanam, literally meaning "marriage without marriage." It was a kind of non-marriage in which P did not take up any of the responsibilities of a normal husband. The couple stayed on in the same house. There were many such non-marriages in P's life; short term relationships and affairs that were started, conducted and terminated with incredible levity. But it was his first love, Kunjilakshmi that P always considered as his lifelong love.

In the intoxication of conjugal bliss his poetic output declined. His income fell. When he ceased to be a source of cash flow, his wife's sister and brother-in-law started murmuring. Then one day they just shoved him out of the house. P. and his wife who was pregnant moved to Palakkad.

They spent a couple of years there living on the income from the few prose works that he wrote for different publishers and the poems that were published in periodicals like *Prabhatam*. They lived in rented houses. His first child, a daughter was born during this time.

"The bird on the branch of the Moringa tree in Palakkad changed its nest, changed its village." P. writes. This time they went to Ponmula near Kottakkal where his wife's ancestral house was situated. The poet writes about the Ponmula village:

"The field donning soft silk; the footpaths branching away in different directions. Areca trees laden with bunches of pink coral on both sides. Coconut trees weighed down by bunches of fruit.

Ginger, pepper and bananas. Huge compounds – venues of festivals. The canal flowing through jungles of pineapple sending waves of musical notes to the far distance. The famous Shiva temple by the field. The ancient mosque by the side of the path. The madrassa where religious teaching went on without a break. Houses distempered in saffron. The Muslim with his shaven head, the Nair with the tuft on his head, the Muslim woman with her head covered – all living as the children of the same village. The countryside free from dirt. Land that lights up with the festival of Onam and Vishu...Ponmula."

It was during his stay at Ponmula that P. came into contact with P.K. Brothers, the publishing house based in Kozhikode. The first work of his published by them was a collection of essays that P wrote in one night sitting on a bench in the Railway Station. It was titled *Udayaragam* (the Melody of the Dawn) and he was paid a paltry fifty rupees for the copyright.

Sriramacharitham a work that he wrote in eight days staying in the verandah of the Modern Hotel in Kozhikode

was his first long poetic work to be published. The copyright of this marvellous work that runs into six chapters and depicts the life of Rama from his birth to his coronation was sold for just a hundred rupees. It was during this period that P. wrote Varabhiksha (Gift of a Boon) that portrays Rama's renunciation of Sita in a totally new perspective, and the two collections of poems titled *Deeparadhana* (Worship with the Lamp) and *Pathirapoov* (Midnight Flower.)

Despite writing many books there was no end to the poet's penury. He had a special skill in squandering whatever money he got in a very short time. When he was flush with cash he would give liberally to anyone in need. When he was short, he would take money from whosoever happened to be around and to have cash. His family was ever in want.

To stay peacefully in one place was not compatible with the poet's nature. He reveled in dreaming of journeys and new places. Once he started feeling that he was getting rooted in Ponmula, he became restless. He went off to his house in Kanjangad. He managed to wheedle his father into financing a political weekly named *Navajeevan* that he started publishing from Kannoor. The weekly became the mouthpiece of the Keralite's longing for freedom from foreign domination. It also reflected a lofty moral stance and cultural awareness. The prominent writers of the time including Vallathol and Ulloor contributed to the weekly. P's own articles and poems added lustre to the publication. It gained immense popularity in a short time. The editor became famous. The leading article that P. wrote when Mahatma Gandhi visited Kannoor provoked great enthusiasm all over Kerala.

Though a good writer and editor P. was a stranger to the economics of running a weekly. He had brought his family to Kannoor and set up home in a rented house. The cost

of running the home and the weekly escalated. Income fell. Then on account of a provocative article that P wrote in the weekly, the police raided his office. The editor received a severe warning from the authorities. Not long afterwards the weekly ceased to be published. The editor was deeply in debt. He took his family back to their home in Ponmula. After depositing them there P, true to his style just vanished. P's father brought poor Kunjilakshmi and her daughter who lived in penury to his house and looked after them.

P. lived mostly in Trichur and Thiruvilvamala during this period of expatriation. He was mainly occupied in writing books for the Saraswathi Printing Press. For P, this was the springtime of his poetry, his mind filled with the images of folk art and the pretty damsels of the villages. He wandered along the banks of the Nila searching for folksongs in places like Lakidi, Mangalam and Thiruvilvamala. It was thus that he ran into Karthyayani of Kuthampulli. Karthyayani who worked as a maid in the house in which he lived in Thiruvilvamala was co-opted as a life partner. She lived with him in that house for quite some time. Yet another non-marriage! They had two children. One fine morning the poet disappeared! Karthyayani and the children who were left in the lurch lived in penury and public humiliation. Karthyayani, unable to bear the poverty and mental stress passed away not long afterwards. P's mother, who heard about the tragedy, immediately took the children into her home and brought them up. The younger of the two children died soon. The older one, a daughter named Radha still lives in the house in Kanjangad. Kunjilakshmi's daughter Leela and son Ravindran live nearby.

During his lifetime P was known as a devotional poet. Though he had a spiritual slant right from a young age, he was not much of a devotee till his middle age. He seldom went to temples. All his early poetry centered on nature and

love. It was only after the age of thirty-five that he veered round to the path of devotion. P who once happened to visit Guruvayoor became a staunch devotee of Lord Krishna. He wrote three works, Ananthan Kattil, (In the Ananthan Forest) Bhadradeepam (The Sacred Lamp), and Thamaramala (the Lotus Garland) - all devotional poems. Gradually he visited every temple that came his way. It can be said that there are no temples in Kerala that P had not visited. These visits must have helped him to purify his life that he considered steeped in sin and to regain his strength. Anyway the stamp of the devotional poet got affixed to him and it stuck to him to the end of his days.

P. who ran away when his weekly *Navajeevan* folded up visited his native village only many years later. By that time his daughter Leela was on the threshold of youth. His third child from Kunjilakshmi, a son had died without ever having seen his father. The poem Piranna Mannil (In the Land of Birth) that P, crushed under the weight of remorse wrote during this time, portrays heartrending images of his loving parents and himself.

P spent some time in his native place with his parents and family. It was during this period that he joined the Kootali School near Kannoor as Malayalam Pundit. He did not possess the requisite qualifications for a Malayalam Pundit. Yet the Government of Madras gave him special permission to teach in the High School on the basis of a certificate from Attoor Krishna Pisharody that P had the scholarship and ability to teach Malayalam. He worked in that school for fifteen years. His wife and children lived with him in several spells. The life as a teacher was really painful for P who was an inveterate wanderer. He felt tied down.

"This bird that keeps pecking at the horoscope of strangers, never again can it sing its song in melody." He

wrote in Kaikkiliyude Pekkinav ("The Nightmare of the Pet Bird) in tones of deep melancholy.

At the Sahithya Parishad conference held at Neeleswaram in 1949 the title of "Bhaktakavi" (Devotional Poet) was conferred upon him. His collection of poems published under the title of *Kaliyachchan* (The Master of the Game) won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi award in 1959. In 1967 Pareekshit Raja of Kochi conferred the title of Sahithyanipuna on *P. Thamarathoni* (The Lotus Boat) another collection of his poems brought him the award of the Sahitya Akademi (The National Academy of Letters, India). All the same one is left with the feeling that P. and his poetry did not win the recognition that they deserved during his lifetime. The progressive Kerala society of those days considered him as an outdated writer who upheld the old feudal order and theistic Hinduism. However, during the eighties readers discovered the contemporary relevance of his poetry and P. came into prominence because his works depicted Malayali character in its genuineness, maintained fidelity to the region's basic values and above all displayed a keen awareness of ecology. A rereading and reassessment of his work got underway. That is how the force, beauty and spread of his poetry came to be understood and accepted in Kerala.

At the celebrated conference of the Sahithya Parishad held in Ottappalam in 1952 P.'s work *Kaliyachchan* was presented. "The bank called Kunjiraman Nair has crashed. I am here to auction its notice board." That was what he said before reading out the poems. When he finished reading the last lines, there was thunderous applause. The poem that describes the affectionate, but contentious relation between a Guru and his disciple also told the story of the relation between man and God between the lines. Today it is

considered as one of the greatest poetic works written in Malayalam in the twentieth century.

Around this time Kunjiraman Nair entered into his third non-marriage. A music teacher and his daughter Parukkutty Amma lived in Lakidi. Kunjiraman Nair agreed to marry Parukkutty Amma and went to his village ostensibly to make preparations. However, on the day fixed for the wedding, P got busy with something else and forgot about the whole thing. Later on he went to Lakidi full of remorse and managed to persuade Parukkutty Amma to accept him. The heady days of the first months passed quickly and differences between the spouses came up like weeds in the monsoon. He had to terminate the relationship and leave. Parukkuty Amma now lives in Lakidi with their daughter Balamani.

Kunjiraman Nair happened to go to Kollamkod, in the valley of the Thenmala ranges to consult a physician. He was fascinated by the natural beauty of the place and decided to take up permanent residence there. He writes:

"Man-high porter's rests made of stone ready to take on the burdens of the traveller, an ocean of endless fields, lotus lagoons, the land of blue mountains... The Thenmala raised her hand and whispered 'Stay here for a few days. We will manage with what little we have The gentle breeze, lotus flowers, bird song, frank sunrises, clear moonlight, the sky with its blue aura .. Look, I will give the poet all that he needs.

The mountain whispered, 'Come... come back soon. There is a school here that belongs to the Raja of Kollamkod. You get a transfer to that school. The green forest called out, Come poet, go and come back soon.

Kollamkod, the land of farms, the land of lotus flowers, the land of blue mountains... the mind replied ...Yes, I will come soon." (*Kaviyude Kalpadukal* –p.47)

That is how in 1961 he managed to get a transfer from Kootali and joined the Kollamkod Raja's High School as Malayalam teacher. He lived there for five years in the cool clime of the Thenmala valley. This was a comparatively peaceful interlude in the poet's turbulent life. While at Kollamkod he wrote some of his most famous poems like *Narabali* (Human Sacrifice).

In 1966 he left the Kollamkod School. He had made up his mind to spend what he considered his last days in the beautiful village of Thiruvilvamala on the banks of Nila that had always fascinated him. His autobiography, *Kaviyude Kalpadukal,* starts with a description of the village.

"On all the four sides the horizon with its blue canopy – enormous blue depth beyond the reach of clouds. The mountains – granite steps leading to the blue lagoon of sheer beauty – to the East to the South, to the West, to the North – the lagoon with mountains in array like lotuses with open blue petals. Rocky hills of boundless dreams, sleepy fields with their glass bangles – gardens, their greenery half wiped out, country houses that send sidelong glances at you, the Bharatapuzha singing folksongs on her way to her husband's house, her anklets jingling.

The sandy bank of the Nila, its memory of vanished moonlight still alive, the playground of birds, the ferry with its sunken cheeks, the path to the temple, the boat plagued by piles, the boat house in spectacles of patchwork in tin.

Far away the Vilvadri range lost in meditation, the temple with the crown of the Lord's dark tresses. Thiruvilvamala."

P. had left Kollamkod with a substantial amount of money consisting of his retirement benefits and the fat purse given to him by his admirers as a parting gift.

He bought a house near the Thiruvivamala temple and spent all the money in repairing and fitting it out.

Soon he ran out of money and selling the place for a pittance he bade adieu to his beloved Thiruvilvamala where he had lived for four or five years. From there on he had no regular home. He had no permanent address. Making stopovers at Kozhikode, Guruvayoor, Trichur, Kottayam and Thiruvananthapuram he wandered all over Kerala. During these unsettled days he wrote his three famous autobiographical volumes for different mgazines – *Kaviyude Kalpadukal*, for *Mathrubhoomi*, *Enne Thirayunna Njan* (I in Search of Myself) for *Kumkumam* and *Nithyakanyakayethedi* (In Search of the Eternal Virgin.) for *Manorama*. He decided to publish a volume of his selected poems under the title *Ratholsavam* (Chariot Festival). For this he got a grant from the Government and a loaṇ from a bank. Although he brought out the collection in two volumes, he failed to distribute the lot to book sellers and the sales were not too good. He was unable to pay back the loan and the bank confiscated a good many copies. Thus even in a noble venture with a good deal of backing and goodwill the poet lost money and courted humiliation.

In his last days he was harried by diseases of the heart and kidney. He had to spend two or three long spells in hospitals in places like Trichur. In his autobiography, *Nithyakanyakayethedi*, he gives touching descriptions of his time in the hospital.

During his last days he stayed at Thiruvananthapuram in the Sir. C.P. rest house that belonged to the government. On Saturday the 27th of May 1978 he died of a heart attack in his sleep. The employees of the rest house transferred the unclaimed dead body to the Medical College. Once the news of the poet's death spread, friends and the luminaries of the literary and cultural worlds gathered and took charge of the body. The procession proceeded northward. The body was

kept for public viewing at Eranakulam in the Sahithya Parishad Hall and at Trichur in the Sahitya Akademi Hall.

The cremation was done in the public cemetery at Cheruthuruthy on the banks of the Bharatapuzha. Thus his final resting place was on the banks of the Nila that he had loved all his life. The weary body turned to ashes in the presence of a large crowd. His children, relatives and admirers were present.

This is how the poet paints his life and himself.

"Searching for poetry, I reached the street of brothels. Searching for the temple I reached the cemetery. Strolling along with my eyes fixed on the stars I fell into the abandoned well. Offering sweets to people who didn't want them, I got pelted with stones. Leaping up to grasp the sky I lost the earth. This is the inner melody of my lute – then, now, ever. Love, love, love. But I never saw the honeycomb, never tasted the honey. There is something wrong. somewhere. The potion that I applied to my body to make myself fair gave me white leprosy. My melodies wove themselves into cacophony. My rhythm went wrong. What rhythm? The real primeval rhythm. Primeval rhythm. The song that missed the primeval rhythm – that is you, that is you." (*Kaviyude Kalpadukal.* pp. 94/95)

Discoveries, Experiences

He bows to everyone
But yields to none
And only to regret
He makes mistakes.

(Kunjunni)

P. Kunjiraman Nair's mind that ever revelled in noble dreams and lofty ideals reached out to the skies searching for the gateway to heaven. But his body that longed for the pleasures of the senses slid hell-ward through the slippery path of sinful lust. The rules of this world had little relevance for the man who lived only in heaven and hell. For that very reason our weights and measures fail when we size up a man like Kunjiraman Nair. Our logic and analysis serve little purpose.

Kunjiraman Nair was full of contradictory dualities - lust and renunciation, sin and virtue, cruelty and compassion, repetitive folly and repentance. He never bothered to harmonize all this and lead a respectable life. P. was against reconciliations and the consequent loss of freedom. He wandered all over Kerala in absolute freedom sinning as he pleased; regretting and sinning again, seeing sights and writing poetry.

P. says that he is a stranger to himself. One of his works is titled "I in search of myself". He writes in another work titled *Kaviyum Niroopakanum* (The poet and the critic).

On these rising waves like a lotus leaf,
Do you know who I am that does not sink?

I who by the mantra of sacred love
Resurrect the dead, do you know who I am?
Let me keep no secret; not even I who act for a while
In this play know who I am.

Small wonder that a man of this ilk is an insoluble riddle to others. Friends seek to understand this lamp by what they see and feel of the intensity of the light that emanates from it. What they can say about him is therefore subject to severe limitations. Still it is possible that we can get a closer view of the man from what some of them have written and said about him based of their experience than we can from any attempt to understand him directly.

His son V. Ravindran Nair says that he is proud that he is the son of a great man. "Father had great love and compassion not only towards human beings but also towards every living being in the universe. Whenever he saw a cow, whether at home or in the street, he gave it something to eat. His love and compassion extended to birds and even ants."

But amazingly in this votary of universal love there was a cruel sadist. It is said that as a young boy he caught mice in traps and killed them. He would lure wild cats into rooms, close all routes of escape and beat them to death, or throw heavy stones at dogs and maim them. He would chase fowls until in helplessness they fell into the well. Even now Ravindran Nair remembers with pain the torture that he received at the hands of his father for reasons good bad and indifferent.

One day Ravi fell asleep on the reclining chair of his grandfather who had passed away some time ago. The poet who walked in at that moment was outraged. How dare he sit on the poet's father's chair – something that he himself

would never have dreamt of doing. He picked up the boy and flung him against the wall. The boy who was screaming with terror was given a severe thrashing.

The father who subjected the son to cruel torture for reasons that he himself hardly comprehended would melt in the next moment and in immense regret suffocate him with love. As far as the son was concerned this too was a kind of torture.

Vishnunarayanan Namboori describes him as a poet who somnambulated sightseeing in time and space. In a way P. who was through and through a man of Kerala was indeed a poet of all climes. Since he believed that he lived in time that had no beginning or end, he saw this birth merely as a continuation of earlier births and the prelude to future births.

"The blades of grass pointed their fingers. You beggar! You left your lofty place and now you go about sucking up for money and honours. The eyes of the sky became moist. The earth's heart melted. There is time. There is life left. And there are births to come." (*Kaviyude Kalpadukal* – p. 48)

T.P. Krishna Pisharody who was P.'s colleague in the Kollamkod High School has an interesting story about the poet. P. and Pisharody once visited the Thiruvilvamala temple. Right along the steps there were many beggars. P. put his hand into his pocket and taking out whatever cash that he had, gave the beggars amounts of ten and fifteen rupees each. This was more than a hundred times the customary amount of alms given to beggars during those times. After giving the money to each beggar he would whisper to the beneficiary, "I will pay you the rest later." When Pisharody asked him what he meant by that P. replied, "In one of my earlier births, I borrowed money from these people. I am repaying all that in this birth. Since

I do not know the amounts that I borrowed, I tell them that I will pay the rest later".

P. dealt with everyone in much the same manner. The railway porter, the rickshaw puller, the Chief Minister of the state and the ministers of the central government were all treated alike. He writes in his autobiography about Sankunni the rickshaw puller of Trichur, Sayd Alawi the railway porter of Ottappalam and Avaran the labourer in Lakidi with love and respect.

He loved small children more than his life. He always carried dry grapes, peanuts and sugar candy in his pocket. He would give these in handfuls to all children whom he happened to meet. Then he would press his forehead to theirs and whisper "Save me. Save me".

In the classroom he never adhered to any standard method of teaching. Taking classes according to the syllabus, making notes and valuing papers were matters of little interest to P. He would make friends with the pupils, join their games and pranks and generally have a ripping time. In the course of this general merrymaking, he would explain to them whatever had to be learned. His was indeed the most modern method applied without any awareness of the innovation. This often brought upon him the wrath of the headmaster. Achuthan Nair, the headmaster would reprimand him severely and P. would listen, petrified with fear and slink away. Achuthan Nair's successor was a gracious person who was fond of literature. At Achuthan Nair's farewell meeting P. said "The thievish autumn is gone. The spring is with us. Now there will be no famine, no aches. Abundance everywhere - bliss".

P. who ever lived in dreams had no command whatsoever over his life. He lived with no visible order or system as if he was under the spell of some unknown force. He seldom kept an appointment. On the other hand he would suddenly

appear in places where he was not expected at all. While walking briskly along the road he would suddenly stop and look back. After a few moments of deep contemplation he would quietly go back the way he came. He was ever forgetful. Often he would take the letters that he received to the post office and drop them in the box believing them to be replies that he has written. He left his pen, his slippers, his umbrella and even his denture here and there and spent hours searching for them. Once he wrote two letters – one to his wife and the other to K.K.Raja. He sent the letter for Raja to his wife and the one for his wife to Raja. On another occasion he stayed in a hotel at Kollam for a few days. Leaving the place he locked the room and went to the Railway station. While in the running train to his home, he felt his pocket and found the key of the hotel room. When his friends laughed at him he said, "After all I am myself a lock that has lost its key".

Invited to preside over the annual day celebrations of the Teachers' Union of Kasargod he reached the town. After spending a few minutes in the hotel he locked his room and went downstairs. There he saw the big poster of a film by his favourite director V. Shantaram. Without losing one moment he went to the cinema, bought a ticket and went in. It was only when he left the hall after the film that he remembered the meeting over which he had to preside. By the time he reached the venue, it was all over and there wasn't a soul around. There were innumerable instances of P. arriving late or not arriving at all at conferences in which he had important roles.

Iyyamkode Sreedharan, the famous poet who was P's colleague at the Kollamkod School and his constant companion during those times has narrated many stories to the present writer. After dinner P. would set out on a walk. Though he liked to walk alone, sometimes he took

Sreedharan along. He would observe the fields, the hills and every other natural phenomenon with meticulous attention. It must be this close observation that enabled him to reflect the beauty of nature in all its genuineness in his poetry.

The sea fascinated P. the man as well as P. the poet.

"Blue sea. The blue sea entered the mind. The eternal singer. A poet by birth – the limitless blue sea with gems in her bed – a great poet" (*Enne Thirayunna Njan* p.9)

Once P. and Sreedharan were invited to a literary conference in Kannoor. They decided to travel together. Passage was reserved for both by the train that left at 11 p.m. from Olavakkode. P. had come to learn that the famous film "Chemmeen" was running at the local cinema. So he wanted to reach the place early enough to see the matinee show and then catch the train. P. and Sreedharan saw the matinee. P. said that he wanted to see the film once more and that they could see the first night show and still catch the train. Willy-nilly Sreedharan had to agree. Sreedharan had great difficulty in dissuading the poet from staying on to see one more show. Having finally got into the train Sreedharan asked the poet what on earth made him want to see the same film over and over again. What were the parts that attracted him?

"I paid no attention whatsoever to the story." Said P. "I was watching the extensive shots of the sea. I never tire of the vast variety of the moods and colours of the sea. Every time I saw it I wanted to see it again. That is why I wanted to see all the three shows."

P. was ever proud of the culture and uniqueness of his Kerala. He was not prepared to compromise with anything that challenged them. In 1967 the Sahitya Akademi (The National Academy of Letters, India) award was conferred on him for his collection of poems *Thamarathoni*. P. went to

Delhi to receive it. He was given a cheque for ten thousand rupees and the clerk at the Akademi asked him to sign a receipt. P. signed in Malayalam. This was not acceptable to the man. He wanted P. to sign in English. P. refused and returned the cheque. Later in the evening he spoke about this incident at a meeting. Those present felt that the Malayalam language itself had been insulted. Mr. Panampilly Govinda Menon who was a minister in the Central Cabinet was present at the meeting. He rang up the Secretary of the Akademi. The next morning a representative of the Akademi delivered the cheque to P. at his lodge with profuse apologies from the Secretary.

The Indian Minister for Railways, Kamalapathy Tripathy came to know that P. had a desire to visit all the important temples in India. He gave him a complimentary pass that enabled him to travel anywhere in India. Thus he was able to travel from one end of the country to the other.

He was always dressed in his Kurtha and dhoti. N. Gopalakrishnan narrates a hilarious incident that took place during P.'s visit to Kolkata. The Keralites who lived in Kolkata organized a lunch in P.'s honour. Around midday P. left his lodge for the venue of the lunch. But he failed to reach the place. As time passed the hosts became apprehensive and sent out search parties all over the city. At last, the poet was found. He was standing near a cinema in front of a fifteen foot cut out of the beautiful actress Suchitra Sen staring into her luminous eyes. The hosts had some trouble persuading the poet to wrench his eyes from the cutout and accompany them to a very late lunch.

To a person like P. who regarded the world of his dreams as the real world, the discipline, customs and practices of society meant nothing. Little wonder that many of P.'s doings were interpreted by the undiscerning as mere showmanship aimed at grabbing attention. In 1952 when he

got on to the stage at the Sahitya Parishad at Ottappalam to present his work Kaliyachchan he stretched himself full length on the floor in obeisance to Vallathol whom he regarded as his guru. In 1974 at Kasargode the conference of the Sahithya Parishad was inaugurated by Jarasandha, the Bengali novelist. When Kunjiraman Nair came to the stage for his speech he had a bunch of mango flowers in his hand. He presented it to Jarasandha, hugged and kissed him. Jarasandha had some trouble getting out of the bear hug.

R. Ramachandran narrates some of the tantrums that P. threw to squeeze some money out of a publisher. One of his books had been published by the Touring Book Stall of Kozhikode. P. had not received the payment. He reached Kozhikode. Taking Ramachandran with him he went to the Book Stall. It was eight O' clock in the evening. Balakrishna Marar, the proprietor was closing shop. Right in front of the shop he fell at Marar's feet and pleaded "Save me! Save me!"

Ramachandran along with the hundreds of people passing that way bore witness to this scene. Ramachandran adds that he believed that Marar must have paid P. the very next morning.

Most often it is the poet's concrete experience that later appears as poems. But the experiences go through a chemotropic process in the poet's mind before they become his poetic experience in a hue and shape that is almost unrecognizable. E.V. Ramakrishnan in one of his articles describes one such transformation of experience. "One evening P. reached the house of a friend of his. P. who was turning over the pages of the daily *Mathrubhoomi* suddenly became excited. The cause for his change of mood was an advertisement with the title "Has anyone seen?" about a boy who had been lost. The boy was a former student of his at Kootali High School. A little later while still at the friend's place P. wrote a poem. The poem titled *Has anyone seen?* was

about the lovelorn Gopikas searching for Krishna their lover. The transformation that the poet's experience underwent is worthy of note".

In 1945 at the anniversary of the Chinmaya Mission at Kollamkod in which Swami Chinmayananda participated the hosts requested the poet to welcome to the celebrity. He composed a poem right there and recited it.

On the Kadamba tree of history,
The History of Bharat that had once shone bright,
Now drying up in the poisonous wind

Of some strange necromancy
Playing the flute
To bring forth new shoots
Dance on each leaf hereafter
You Chinmayananda.

(*Kaviyude Kalpadukal*. P. 65) (Redo)

T.P. Krishna Pisharody narrated to the present writer another instance of P.'s ability to make beautiful poems in a matter of seconds. Pisharody was packing up for his pilgrimage to Sabarimala. P. who happened to be present asked him to take a coconut as his offering to the deity. On being asked for the coconut, P. wrote the following poem on the piece of paper in which he had packed his beedis.

I shall break a coconut
On the eighteenth step
Please do break along with it
O Lord! My pride too.

Once when P. met Prof. Vazhakkunnam the famous magician, he requested the maestro to show him one of his tricks. Vazhakkunnam reached out with his hand and plucked a big ripe mango out of thin air and gave it to the poet. P. told him that he would give him a robe of honour. When P. met the Professor some five years later he presented

him the robe of honour. It was in the shape of a few lines of poetry.

He that gave me the sweet
And elegant mango
Let him today receive the prize,
The world famous magician.

Many of P.'s contemporaries had similar experiences with him. I have narrated just a few that have been recorded or have come to me by word of mouth. I believe they will be adequate to provide some insight into the strange and luminous personality of the poet. We can understand his poetry in depth only if we have some idea of the kind of individual that he was.

I think I will conclude this section with a quotation of what C. Radhakrishnan wrote about the poet's personality.

"There was no reckoning of any kind. Whether in drinking, imagination, liaisons or sexual anarchy, there was no accounting. No lasting friendships. No enmity towards anyone. Eats well. Breaths poetry. Must have thorough oil baths and a comfortable place to sleep ... as if he was sure that that was all that an emperor who has won this transient and uncomfortable world could ever have.

A man to whom the laws made by others did not apply".

The Autobiographies

Your left eye
Was the son of Suddhodana who left his home.
Your right eye
The wounded son of Drona.
When we learn who is chattering
I you and Ezhuthachchan
Can leap into the roaring
Arabian Sea.

(D. Vinayachandran)

As we noted earlier, Kunjiraman Nair wrote three autobiographical works. All the three were written on prompting by periodicals and published in installments. What appeared in *Manorama* became *Nithyakanyakaye Thedi* (In Search of the Eternal Virgin). The fifty pieces published in *Mathrubhoomi* became *Kaviyude Kalpadukal* (The Footprints of the Poet). The twenty-seven pieces that appeared in *Kumkumam* became *Enne Thirayunna njan* (I in search of Myself).

P. never wrote an autobiography in the conventional sense with a proper beginning, course and end. He just jotted down his recollections of the crucial events in a life that was devoid of any kind of order. He wrote about events in the order in which he remembered them. Hence there is no chronological sequence or continuity in his writings.

In *Nithyakanyakaye Thedi* P. writes about the months that he spent in the Trichur hospital undergoing treatment for cardiac ailments – days of alternating spells of drowsiness and wakefulness. While lying in bed under the influence of

strong medication, he hears the talk among friends, relatives and nurses. Their love and concern causes deep emotional upheaval in his mind. When wide awake he narrates his recollections to them. Sinking into drowsiness again, he talks to himself.

Even in his other autobiographical books the style of narration is a combination of soliloquies and dialogues with friends. A very complex personality is unveiled before us through this process. What P. tells us through his poetry and his creative prose works is much the same. However, his poems speak through abstract images. Hence we see only a blurred image of the personality as though through a veil of mist. Even in his autobiography he uses a great deal of imagery. However through vibrant and dramatic narration of concrete experiences and events and through direct enunciations of his central themes in his autobiographies, he is able to convey a clear picture of his personality. P. flings open the gates of the fortress in which his complex personality was hidden between the lines of his poetry. Thus through his autobiographical works we are able to acquire a comprehensive idea of P. the man as well as P. the poet.

Birth in a famous family in North Kerala as the eldest son of a great father and a noble mother. Adolescence steeped in love and affection. Sanskrit education in Pattambi that lasted about seven years. Youth spent in the abundance of nature, poetry and damsels. Then a life long search for poetry, the eternal virgin. Constant wandering, closely observing and savouring every phenomenon of nature, searching for her reality, lost in her charm. The innumerable relationships that he entered into with country wenches, mistaking them for personifications of true poetry. The intoxication of the early days. The pain of eventual rejection by the girls. The guilt and self deprecation that ensued when he ditched them. Love, respect and devotion to his parents.

The regret of having failed to live up to their expectations caused them immense unhappiness. A journey through life in which he had no control over himself as if he was being carried by some forceful current. The ability to watch like a witness the experiences that he went through - P.'s autobiographies are an honest depiction of his extremely complex personality and the factors and circumstances that contributed to the evolution of that personality.

P. had very clear ideas about what his autobiography should be.

"An autobiography is not the story of shadows. It is the story of shapes. Not the story of language, but of mood. Not the story of inert matter, but of life force. It is the story of the tap root of the universe, the story of the eternal truth, a story without a beginning, without an end, the story of eternity – that is what an autobiography should be".

(*Nithyakanyakaye Thedi* – In Search of the Eternal Virgin p.54)

P. understands that by narrating the story of the transient individual he is telling the story of the essence of the universe that is eternal. Even while abjectly succumbing to all the temptations of the flesh, through his writing he breaks free of the limitations of the body. Sipping the nectar of life from the broken vase of death Kunjiraman Nair builds a bridge between heaven and hell.

P.'s life was one long pilgrimage undertaken as a search to find out who or what he was. Though he has said many times that he did not know who he was, he made many attempts to define himself.

"This fellow is not man, not animal either, not bird, not angel or devil. Then? A creature that is neither bird nor animal. An entity that is neither angel nor devil. A weird

creature linking the star and the blade of grass". (*Nitya-kanyakaye Thedi* p.18)

"The stinking mud pond. A single lotus bud in it. Intense darkness. Right in the centre a single lamp that never goes out. Dark night. The midnight star in the distance. The black touch-stone. A golden streak in it. A man crushed. A poet blooming – that is P. Kunjiraman Nair".

(*Nityakanyakaye Thedi* P.24)

The lotus bud, the lamp that never goes out, the midnight star and the golden streak are surely the poetry that burns bright in the poet. Akkitham describes Kunjiraman Nair as 'a poet from head to toe.' For P. every moment of life was poetry itself. What is poetry? What should poetry be? Many a time he taxed his brain searching for an answer.

"The worshipper, the offering for puja, and the one that is worshipped – in the ultimate dedication, in the deepest meditation, they all become one. The poet blooms out as his poetry. The singer becomes the song. The deathless poetry of the transient poet becomes the eternal virgin and dances within and without the universe.

The song sung for nothing, for no one but just for one's own delight. The poem written for one's own thrill. The poem that oozes out by itself from the mind – that is what poetry is. The bee that hums about savouring honey. Those who have such minds have won. They will not know poverty. They will not ever see hell". (*Kaviyude Kalpadukal* p.161)

"The poet who celebrates the dawn of eternity. The poet who transcribes infinity on a green leaf. The poet who encloses the luster of the unfading star in the fading flower. He is the postman of the resonance of pure sound that dwells in the silver castle between heaven and earth".

(*Kaviyude Kalpadukal.* P.123)

"In the ecstasy of beauty, like the bride on the night of honeymoon, like the fruit laden tree swinging in the monsoon gale, the knotted nerves loosening, the blue sky after the rain of tears has drained out, the earth combing her hair after a ritual bath.

The universe at this moment is the universe of ultimate bliss. At this estuary where the inside and the outside, the sky and the earth, the creator and the creatures melted into one, in the holy waters of this confluence, may my boat overturn and may I sink – Let a bubble of eternity – a poem of one syllable rise".

(*Kaviyude Kalpadukal.* P.342)

The natural beauty of Kerala was one of the main sources of inspiration for Kunjiraman Nair's poetry. For P. nature was ever in motion. All natural phenomena expand, contract, move, rejoice and ache. For P. man was just a part of nature.

"The woods for the spotted deer, water for fish, sky for the bird and for the poet nature that yields up the peace of being all by oneself. Man is a member of that family."

(*Kaviyude Kalpadukal.* P.50)

P. saw human elements in all natural phenomena. The dawn that weighs in gold the ruby that is the morning sun in a ritual prayer for its longevity, the dusk that arrives like a damsel with her headload of corn in sheaves, the harvested field – the mother that has lost her babe, the stars that gather wild vegetable in the muddy field, the white clouds in freshly ironed clothes sauntering in the sky ... so goes P's poetic imagery that sees human attitudes and the story of man in nature. P. conversed constantly with all objects and manifestations of nature. They were all his friends and relations. And they in turn kept chatting with him.

"The Peepul tree in the schoolyard called. I folded my hands and said "Peepulmaster, I will come tomorrow."

(*Kaviyude Kalpadukal.* p.192.)

"The hills of Vadamala said, let's sleep hugging each other. The moonlit night said I will give you fresh milk every day; the sugarcane field said I will give the sweetness that your poet's heart needs".

(*Kaviyude Kalpadukal*. p.194.)

P. writes about all natural phenomena that assume new shapes and moods with every season and cycle of events, dance and sing, burst out laughing, roar thunderously and shed tears. He is ever observing nature closely and experiencing her.

"The cloudy month of Cancer. The rains without a break. The star of Ardra. Transplantation in the fields. The courtyard a sea. The gale that jostles the garden. Rain, thunder, lightning – And against that hum in the background grandfather reads the *Ramayana*".

(*Kaviyude Kalpadukal*. p.120.)

"The rainy monsoon night of the five-day-old moon rowed the boat and went out of sight. The bats sucked honey from the budding plantain and flew off to some unknown destination".

(*Kaviyude Kalpadukal*. p.36)

"The month of Aries passed by swinging garlands of Laburnum and humming a song. Silken raindrops fell into the furrows of the earth steaming with pangs of separation. The earth fresh from her ceremonial bath after menses. The clouds waiting for a chance. The sky with wriggling shoals of lightning fish. The chariot festival of rain. The crowding clouds. The rains are coming. The monsoon is coming to shower pearls on this earth. Monsoon that is the folk dance of thunder lightning and gale. The monsoon of this land of mountains that is not seen elsewhere".

(*Kaviyude Kalpadukal*. p.36)

P. claims that he has written over fifty thousand poems, more than two thousand pieces in blank verse, and about five

hundred books. Most of them must have been sold to publishers for paltry sums. Many did not have a second edition. Copies of the first editions are not available. So what we now have are just about a hundred works. P. never cared to preserve copies of his works and save them for the coming generations. So many of them have disappeared like flowers in the deep forest that whither away having shed their lustre for a while in the wilderness. It is not the poet's loss. It is ours. A man who believed that the true poet was the postman who distributed money orders from house to house, can only write poetry. His lack of interest in publishing them and preserving them for the future once he got the cash need not cause any wonder. "The paradigm of poetry. – I would like to know what it is. I am not the poet – Poet...the poet that wrote the poem of the Universe. I am merely the cheap plastic pen in his hand.

The voice that one hears when the command comes is not that of the oracle. The voice of the ultimate power that fills the world. The voice of the agonies of heaven. That sound is thunder. Thunder that breaks open the heart of the universe".

(*Kaviyude Kalpadukal.* p.107)

P. never tired of talking about poetry, the eternal virgin and her playmate, the universe. The damsels that are the seasons do marvellous embroidery on her green-blue sari. The frothy waves of the southern sea fix gems on her golden anklets. The hours of spring's dusk come with silver plates to gather jasmine buds from the skies to scatter on her silken bed. The glowing dusk prepares henna for her lotus feet. Like many other romantic poets, P too loved to wander among natural phenomena and merge himself with them by a process akin to transmigration.

For P nature was mother too. In his autobiography he enumerates all the wrongs that he did to his mother. Not many other writers have given such forceful expression as P

has to the sense of guilt, self deprecation and remorse for having ill treated nature after growing up into self sufficient manhood in full enjoyment of her blessing and affection.

"It is the cow that gave birth to the calf. Cow is the mother that gave birth. It is this mother earth that is the mother of the departed souls. Mother! I kicked you, hated you, disobeyed you. Animal among animals, ghost among ghosts, devil among devils I crushed you under my slippers. Walked about stamping on you. I dumped on your head the garbage bin of pride, arrogance, vengefulness, jealousy and mean thoughts. Oh, mother of the departed souls, today I hug your feet and beg for pardon. I wash your feet with my tears. Please rescue from this onrush of black darkness this son who drank of phony life and losing his head, losing his way turned a beggar in his land and a tramp in the world. May hate turn into compassion. May the mischievous mind behold the kingdom of nature's beauty".

(*Nithyakanyakaye Thedi* p. 45)

P. lived in an era of renaissance when man believed that there were no worlds that his will could not conquer. Man ventured to use, exploit, subjugate and even destroy nature for his pleasure and the fulfillment of his desires. Notions of nature as mother were considered unscientific. People like P who believed that when man destroyed nature he was destroying himself were dubbed unscientific old timers. But now in the present times, when in the context of extensive destruction of nature ecological conservation has become essential for man's survival we see a resurrection of P. as the prophet of truth. His words have become the mantra for the safety of mankind in peril.

"The son who depends on his mother's kindness beats her up. Man who survives on the mercy of nature tortures that very nature. Nature that lavished on him air, water, light, soil and food. Man who challenged and harmed nature

– nature that is love itself – is now himself going to pieces".

(*Nithyakanyakaye Thedi.* p. 118)

"This desert road, the trees that once gave shade have been slaughtered. Oh man! Their crime? What crime did they commit? The crime that the Buddha committed. Christ committed. Gandhi committed. They took the heat of the sun on themselves and gave you cool shade. You have hands. You have weapons that can cut. With your eyes on bundles of currency notes you cut down trees that gave you shade. The wild forest. You burned down nature's luscious parks. You cut down everything. Whom did you chop down? You chopped down man. You cut at the roots of man's well being. The tree that you cut fell on man - fell on you and you died".

(*Enne Thirayunna Njan* P.106)

P. was a traveller all his life. He saw many places in the course of his wanderings. He met people, made friends and quarrelled with many people. He had liaisons with many women. Every relationship turned into tragedy in some way or the other. Bearing the dead weight of all those tragedies, he continued on a lifelong search for his eternal virgin. His journeys, the places that he saw, the relationships that he entered into, their thrills and their pains, the friends whom he abandoned, the damsels that he ditched, his sins, his repentance, the world of poetry that he ever dreamed of and did penance to realize – all this come to life in his autobiographies and parade before us as in a cinema.

Punnasseri Nambi Neelakantha Sharma, Nalappadan, Vallathol, Vidwan P. Kelu Nair, K.K.Raja, Changampuzha and Sanjayan are some of the great personalities whose live pictures P's golden pen has drawn for us. In his autobiographies places like Thiruvananthapuram, Kanyakumari, Kanjangad, Thiruvilvamala, Kollamkod become vibrant with life. P. had the unique ability to describe places in a way that reflected the totality of their

culture. When he reaches the Padmanabha temple in Thiruvananthapuram, he recalls Vilvamangalam Swamiar who was a great devotee. Travelling across the countryside of Nanjinad, the characters of C.V.Raman Pillai's famous novels come to his mind. Each relationship with women took him to a state of intoxication. When the intoxication subsided he would desert them without a thought. Thereafter he lived with the resultant pain, guilt and remorse. Yet very soon he longed for the same intoxication with another woman. In his autobiographies he recounts each of these experiences that he courted and went through causing immense pain to himself and others. These are all solemn confessions that the poet makes before his creator with a totally open heart.

He concludes *Kaviyude Kalpadukal* with a discussion that has overtones of a horoscope. "Birth in the month of Leo. The star Thiruvonam. Vulture on the tree. The jackal below. The dog. Man in shabby clothes. In a state of mourning for parents with whom he has quarrelled. A chap with no confidence or efficiency. Destined for partial asceticism. False devotee. False ascetic. Illustrious family. Huge patrimony. Not destined to enjoy either. His own brother his worst enemy. Obsessed with other people's wives. A man who lost everything on account of women. A man who brought bad reputation to his family. He has children. But he might as well have not had them. A mother who died weeping for her son. A man who lost all virtue, helpless. His wives are all his enemies. Cat fight. No homeland. No house. Extravagance. Perpetually in debt. Born at the wrong moment. Always on the move across the country. Sudden death." The poet says that the story of his life is just an enlarged version of this 'horoscope'.

P. sums up to state where he reached and what he became at the end of his long journey.

"Started out for the temple. Reached the cemetery. Set out in search of poetry. Lost home, family wealth, patrimony – everything. Wanted to climb the peak of the Himalaya. Slipped and fell into an abyss. Everything done by way of rectification led to bigger mistakes. The knots tightened with every attempt to loosen them. Every step turns false. The vision blurs. Today I am the camel of the desert. Having bitten off and chewed the thorny cactus and lacerated the mouth, he goes on savouring his own blood".

(*Kaviyude Kalpadukal.* p.414.)

References

1 Samakaleena Kavita. 6th Issue. Page 231.

2 Piyude Pranaypapangal. Alamkod Leelakrishnan. Page27

3 What Iyyamkode Sreedharan told the author.

4 Adhyapakanaya P. M.K.Ramakrishnan Kootali (Mahakavi P. – Page 250)

5 What Iyyamkode Sreedharan told the author.

6 Kanmaanilla Mahakaviye – N. Gopalakrishnan. (Vazhv Enna Peruvazhi Page 25)

7 Kaviyude Mampoo – M.N.Karasseri (Mahakavi P.Smaranika – Page 81)

8 Mahakavi P. Chila Ormakal. R. Ramachandran. (Samakaleena Kavita. 6th Issue. Page 232)

9 Lolapeeethambaracharthukalkappuram. E.V.Ramakrishnan (Samakaleena Kavita Page 241)

10 Vazhakkunnathinte Manthrikalokam. Njayath balan.Page 45.

11 Ithalle Ithraneravum… C.Radhakrishnan. (Mahakavi P. Smaranika 1999 page 94.

Other works in prose

To find the flower
That fell from your hand
We will scan the grains of sand
One by one hereafter.
(C.V. Govindan)

P. was fond of writing poetry. But it was works in prose that the publishers demanded. So for the sake of money he had to write quite a few plays and essays. His first work in prose was *Charithraraksha* which he wrote in 1931 for the Sriramakrishnodayam Press of Olavakkode. It was a play based on the Sanskrit play called *Ascharyachoodamani* by Saktibhadra. However, since P introduced fundamental changes and new ideas into the work it can be considered as an original work. The story covers the portion of the *Ramayana* from Soorpanakha's lusty approach to Rama and Lakshmana to Sita's ordeal by fire. P. finds access to the soul of the original poet and depicts the main characters, Rama Sita and Hanuman through vibrant and expressive dialogues. The message that P conveys through this work is that a woman's true wealth is her chastity and her highest duty is to preserve chastity.

Charitraraksha the rights for which were sold to the publisher for a miserable sum of a hundred rupees turned out to be a box office hit. It became a text-book for the high school. The publisher became rich through the sale of thousands of copies. P. was persuaded by the publisher to write a good many plays and novels in addition to *Charitraraksha*. He translated the Sanskrit play *Naganandam*. The play that presents the supreme sacrifice

performed by Jeemoothavahana to save his tribe of snakes. During this period, P read the Kannada translations of many of Dwijendralal Roy's Bengali plays and wrote Malayalam versions. Sita, Durgadas, Mevad Pathanam, Amarasimhan, Shahjahan, Bheeshmar, Karnan, and Chandraguptan are important among them.

Apart from translations P. has written some plays of his own. *Veeraradhana* (Hero Worship) is a one-act play on the theme of the conflict between the Raja of Pazhassi and the British. P. sought to express through this play his pride in the culture of India and his strong resentment against the British colonial invaders. What the Raja tells the British Commander Lord Wellesley brings out the spirit of the play.

The white man knows nothing about the inner self of this land of sages. What would the vendor of costume jewelry know about the worth of the sacred Salagram stone? What is merely a granite pillar for the atheist is the all giving Goddess for the believer. The attitude of the foreigner who lands in India is that of the thief who sneaks into the temple to steal the bejeweled image of the deity".

P.'s imagination played merrily with the mythology of India with its admixture of history.

He wrote a play based on the life of Nandanar, the famous devotee. Another famous work of his is a novel based on the great legend of Kerala, the story of the twelve clans that were established by the twelve children of the low caste Parayi woman and her Brahmin husband. In addition he wrote a short play on the life of Pakkanar, one of the twelve sons of the couple. The annual festivals of Onam and Thiruvathira always fascinated P. The one-act plays that he wrote about these two celebrations bear witness to his keen interest in them. He consciously tried through his short plays to awaken self respect and a longing for freedom in the

minds of the people of Kerala. "What filled Mathvar's eyes with tears must be the sight of the tears of the poor people of this land where once milk and honey flowed - the people who have nothing to eat or to wear, though this land once lavished gold and jewels on lands beyond the seas - the military school of hot-blooded young men turning into a cemetery for the corpses of slaves." This is what P. says in Onappookkal.

In addition to the eighteen plays P has some fifteen long stories, to his credit. Though he claimed that his novels Indira, Ramabai, and Nirmala were original works, we cannot rule out the possibility that they are inspired by works in other languages. All the events take place in towns and villages in Northern India. He had not visited any of the places at the time he wrote these novels. Moreover, P's originality and personality that are vividly visible in his original works are altogether missing in these novels. Certain dramas like Premachandran too fall into this category.

The emotion that stands out in all P's plays and stories is that of pride in the ancient culture of India and the heroic traditions of Kerala. The themes of most of them have been adapted from myths, legends, folklore and folksongs. Ideals like truth, sacrifice, compassion and non-violence that he valued immensely and the ancient culture of India rooted in these values were perennial sources of inspiration for P. The Kerala tradition of treating self respect and freedom as the very air that sustained life was yet another factor that influenced him. One of the main aims of his literary works was to wake up the Indian who had pawned his ideals and self-respect to the foreigner with his low cunning and might of weapons and become his slave. He wanted to inspire his people to become brave soldiers of freedom. He chose the themes for his stories and short plays to suit this end. As far as P. was concerned Mahabali, Rama and Harischandra were

not mere characters in his plays; they were beacons of the ideas that had always determined the fate of the country. Thrikkakkara, Kasi and Ayodhya are not mere places for P. They are patches of heaven on earth which we forfeited due to our inadvertence and which we should regain by means of conscious effort. For him the Indian struggle for Independence was a major sacrificial ritual performed to regain that lost world in our times. And the leader of the battle was Mahatma Gandhi. Though the sordid fact remains that P. wrote entirely for the sake of money and on the promptings of publishers, the inspiration behind his good plays and stories was his irrepressible desire to recreate his lost world. Biographical works like Kerala Kshetrathile Kedavilakkukal, Mahacharitham, and Raghu too were written keeping this purpose consciously in view.

For P. poetry was life and life was poetry. Most of his prose works were indeed themselves poetry. Udayaragam, Pratibhankuram, and Vicharaviharam are collections of his essays. In these he deals with his favourite themes - poetry, love, separation, Indianness, nature, annual festivals, education, reforms, culture and the essence of the culture of Kerala.

Most of P's writings are revelations of what he discovered from the very process of his life and his contemplation on man and the universe. Truth often reveals itself to the consciousness of poets even as it does to the meditating sage. Much of what he wrote had a scriptural tone.

1. The poet removes the blazing disc of the rising sun and places a golden plate in its place. He makes a canopy of the blue sky. He strings the dew drops into a chain of pearls. He makes the river laugh and cry. What nature creates is only the crepe paper. The poet creates a flower with it. Nature is the clay. Poetry is the statue made out of it. Nature is gold. Poetry is the sculpture done with it.

The poet makes a top out of the rising sun and playing with it becomes a small boy. With one arm on the shoulder of life and the other on the shoulder of death the poet walks along as a young man.... He links hands with the earth covered with new flowers and the sky spread with stars. (Kavyam - Udayaragam)

2. Vishnu and Shiva are two pictures of the ideals of India. Nowhere except in India can you see this Sankara who just swallowed the deadly poison with no second thoughts to save the world. It is only in India that you will see a Vishnu who retained as a permanent ornament the mark made by the kick of a vagabond.

3. In the intoxication of love the soul dances away unaware that the clothes have fallen off.

   This world is a false note that emanated from the creator's lute. Love is the pure note inherent in the cacophony.

   Every man, every creature, every grain of sand is a drop of milk that was wafted out of the sea by some unknown gale. (Premam – Udayaragam)

4. The poetic heart has the duty to be ever alert for the moment when the lightning of true art flashes. Art will not wait for the poet. The poet must wait for that inner light.

   The silent wait for that divine music from heaven is the poet's beautiful life. (Minnal – Udayaragam)

5. Life is a search for something that is in excess of mere need. To get on without dying you need only food. Grain would be sufficient. You don't need flowers. Clouds will do. You don't need the rainbow. (Anavasyam-Udayaragam)

6. From our schools the corporations get some clerks – the world does not get human beings.

What today's education does is to administer treatment to healthy people and make them sick. It is not a process that helps them to soar upwards to the stars. It tramples them down to the netherworld. It keeps one in somnolence. It is not light. It is darkness. It is not the anodyne. It is poison. This is not knowledge. This is ignorance. (Mahat – Udayaragam)

7. The act of showing an open palm is desire. It is from the closed palm that you give. Give. Dedicate everything to everybody. I forgot that lesson of love.
8. The rose does not bloom for fame. Not for anything. It just blooms – that is all. At the touch of the divine hand of poetry, a tide enters the heart of the poet. From that experience of inner happiness, from that bubbling ocean of feeling a few drops are spilled. These are poems. (Anukarana Sahithyam –Prathibhankuram)
9. We sit under the coconut palm and drink soda water bought on credit. We sell the cow that has calved and bargain for milk powder. We throw away the substance of the fruit and chew the skin.(Malayaliyude Parambaryam-Vicharaviharam)
10. He that does not have self confidence is the slave. We who see cinemas and ignore Kathakali, we who watch the dancing slut and forget the greatness of our mothers. What wonder is there that we who constantly indulge in self deprecation and imitate others have turned out to be slaves? (Rajyabhimanamullavarayi-rikkuka – Vichara-viharam.)
11. Man who challenges nature is the vainglorious son who squanders whatever was given to him and then fights with his mother for his share of the property. Cursed by his mother he will have no peace wherever he goes. (Poonthanavum Jnanappanayum –Vicharaviharam)

12. Criticism should spread the fragrance of beauty in the dawn of truth. Criticism is the lofty seat of the judge who wears the crown of truth

The realm of the poet – there the past, the future, the present, all link hands and dance the steps of Shiva's dance. Darkness and light, life and death embrace each other and immerse themselves in the intoxication of bliss. The poet's realm is a kingdom that is not divided into pieces by time, clime and conditions. (Kavithayude Ithivrtham. VicharaViharam.)

For P. poetry was the road as well as the destination. He wandered all his life in search of his eternal virgin who dwelt in the sanctum sanctorum of truth and beauty. It was in making love to her every minute that he sought a path to her. It is through experience that the artist pursues the path of his search. Writing each of his poems he savoured and enjoyed each part of his goddess of poetry. That which was left of her that he could not so savour and enjoy ever remained his temptation. In search of that left over, he scrambled about like a man with his clothes on fire. What he depicts in every one of his works is the saga of the bliss and the agony, the recognition and the rejection that he received in the course of this desperate search. The descriptions of actual events in his autobiographies, the life stories of the epic characters of his plays and novels, the prophetic pronouncements about his ideals in his essays and the rhythmic enunciations in the language of imagery in his poetic works tell the same story.

For P, mankind and nature, the individual and society, man and woman are all one and the same - fragments of perfection in search of Perfection. Plays, novels, stories, articles and poems are all one and the same – fragments of the goddess of poetry that he conceives as perfection itself.

Long poems

What logic could have created
A man of this sort
But the aura of faith
That is blinder than blindness itself?
(Akkitham)

Five long poems have come down from P. to us. They are Sriramacharitham (The Story of Sri Rama) Varabhiksha (Seeking a boon) Ananthan Kattil (In the forest of Anantha) Bhadradeepam (The holy lamp) and Prema Pournami (The Night of the Full Moon of Love)

The first one to be published was Sriramacharitham that he wrote in mere eight days sitting in the cramped verandah of the Modern Hotel in Kozhikode, pestered by mosquitoes and bed bugs. It is the story of the Ramayana. Here P. performs the incredible miracle of presenting in just 619 stanzas the entire substance of Valmiki's magnificent and voluminous work that runs into thousands of stanzas without losing any of its essence. The work that begins with obeisance to great poets like Valmiki, Kalidasa and Thunchath Ezhuthachchan narrates the story from Rama's birth to his coronation without omitting any event of significance. It is a eulogium of basic values like integrity and sense of duty. In this, it is not different from the epic that inspired the work. In fact there was always a kingdom of virtue – a Ramarajya - in P's heart. What he called Thrikkakkara, Swarajyaa, Land of birth, Golden Temple and the Skies were all one and the same – the ideal land of truth

and high values that had a permanent place in his heart. P. took great pride in the social order rooted in truth and duty that he believed to have existed in India in ancient times. He was deeply distressed by its decline and perversion. Its resurrection was ever his dream. The Indian Independence movement was in his eyes the practical path to the realization of that dream. P did not rewrite the story of Ramayana for the fun of story telling. By narrating the saga of the search for truth by one of the most virtuous and heroic kings of India he wanted to awaken the longing for freedom in the enslaved people of India. It does appear significant in the context that P's first prose work Charithraraksha too was based on Ramayana.

He indicates in the concluding portion of Sriramacharitha that a prosperous and highly cultured kingdom did come into existence soon after Rama's coronation.

Truth wore the crown of gold
Dharma took up the scepter.
Such was the Kingdom
That was ruled by Rama.

It doesn't end with that. He has something to say about the present state of affairs.

That golden page has
Been turned over by the gale,

On the divine play
The curtain has fallen.

The lute's string broke long ago,
And the orchestra has ceased.
From the temple of Karma,
No call of the conch resonates.

That steadfastness in truth
That devotion to the notion of sacrifice,

A century has come that has made them
Mere lies of days bygone.

The poet who holds aloft India's cultural heritage and at the same time, describes its present pathetic state, hews out a road from the past to the future. He tries to wake up and lead a whole generation towards a free country of his vision – a country sustained by truth.

The story of Varabhiksha is that of Rama's renunciation of Sita. The most novel and original part of the work is the case that Santha, Sita's sister makes out in favour of Sita when Rama though at the cost of great sorrow to himself, decides to banish his wife to the forest with the sole purpose of protecting the dignity of his royal throne. Through her words she sharply criticizes and strongly upbraids Rama, the male, the embodiment of authority who ignores and insults Sita who is ready to sacrifice everything for her love. The accepted moral code always regarded woman as a mere instrument of pleasure and a means of begetting progeny. She was forbidden to have thoughts and feelings of her own. She was ever a slave to man. She spoke and thought in a language that was evolved by a society that was centered on the male. The notion that woman speaks in the language designed by man is comparatively modern. But wonder of wonders. P. who is an acknowledged old timer raises this point through Santha's outburst.

To reveal a man's mind
This battered language is more than enough.
But till this moment no language is born
That can speak the mind of a woman.

It is through such revelations that the poet turns into a prophet.

Till the age of 35 or so the poet had no great faith in temples. He says in his autobiography that though he lived

in Trichur for long and had walked about the Thekkinkad maidan many times it never occurred to him to take a ritual bath and pray at the temple of the Lord Vadakkumnathan. After the age of thirty-five he happened to visit the Guruvayoor temple with a friend of his. In his poem *Annathe Vishukkani* he recalls this event which radically transformed his life. On the eve of Vishu, the feast of the vernal equinox they took a boat from Tirur to the landing at Chavakkad and walked to the temple through the open country. They reached the temple and first thing in the morning beheld the incredibly beautiful image of Lord Krishna. He describes how the experience changed him irreversibly.

Free of my will a note
Resonated in my mind.
The helm of that yellow robe,
Got entangled with the very breath of my life.

I was changed in that one moment
Some unknown magnet touched me
And the cruelties in me
Drained out in tears.

Till his very last days P. never once let go of that helm of the yellow robe that got entangled with his life-breath. But even this total devotion could not help him to control or overcome the desires of his body. It is possible that once he laid at the feet of his deity all that was good and bad in him, all his karma and his entire ego, he got some respite from the sense of guilt and loneliness that had always haunted him. In any case his deep devotion to the Lord of Guruvayoor produced two beautiful poems – *Ananthan Kattil* and *Bhadradeepam.*

Ananthan Kattil is the life of Vilvamangalam Swamiyar, a great devotee of the Lord of Guruvayoor. After spending

a long period of time meditating in Guruvayoor, Vilvamangalam went to Trichur and stayed at the Naduvil Madhom. There he was doing his puja, his mind filled with the image of the Lord, when Krishna appeared in the shape of a mischievous boy. The boy grabbed the materials for the puja and started worshipping Vilvmangalam. After completing the puja when the boy made a move to fall at his feet the perplexed Vilvamangalam stopped him. While doing so he pushed the boy with the back of his hand. Offended by this the boy vanished saying that if Vilvamangalam wanted to see him again he would have to search him out in the forest of Ananthankad. Distraught with pangs of separation Vilvamangalam wandered about like a mad man searching for the forest. At last in the thick forest near Thiruvananthapuram, the Lord appeared before him in all his splendour. After this episode, Vilvamangalm renounced all worldly rituals and wandered all over India praying for the well being of the whole mankind.

Just as the devotee goes about searching for his God, the deity too wanders about in search of his devotee. When the screen between God and his devotee slides away, the truth that they are both one and the same dawns upon the devotee. It was to make Vilvamangalam aware of this non-duality that the Krishna played the drama of getting offended with him and after many trials and tribulations revealed himself to him. Ananthankad was truly a stage set for the revelation of the eternal and incomprehensible truth.

The poet's imagery often sprouts from his sub-conscious. When he seeks to visualize the relation between Vilvamangalam and God, naturally his mind recalls the bond between his mother and himself. For P. his mother whom he loved and respected immensely was the emblem of all that was good in the world. P. was a habitual absconder who even while living happily in the shade of his mother would

just go off searching for his own world. On festive days like Onam and Vishu, his mother would prepare a grand feast and wait for her son. He would fail to turn up. When the food turned stale, she would throw it away. At that very moment P. would come strolling in. P. described Vilvamangalam who waited for Krishna after the puja in the following lines.

Like the mother who eagerly waits
For the birthday boy,
The lovelorn devotee waited
For a glimpse of his gorgeous lord.

All the great lines that P. wrote were in one way or the other autobiographical.

The theme of ***Bhadradeepam*** too revolved around Guruvayoor and the Lord of Guruvayoor. As far as P was concerned the Guruvayoor temple was no mere place of worship. It was the end goal of the pilgrimage of his life. There all creation, moving or static, in the universe meets face to face with the universal soul of which they are but parts and become one with it. What goes on in the temple between the moment when the sanctum sanctorum opens and the instant when it closes is this joyous festivity of this meeting with the universal soul and the dissolution of oneself into it. Every natural phenomenon participates in this process. The waves of the ocean sing in devotion tapping gently on the drums. The mountain ranges stand lost in meditation. The clouds with their bangles of lightning crowd the sky. The night adorns herself with the jewelry of stars. And then?

Donning robes
With golden embroidery,
Pure, she comes along the eastern path,
Bows softly.

The dawn
Ritually weighs in gold
The ruby, the sun, her pet
To ensure his longevity.

Not only the dawn, the dusk, the seasons, the ocean and the sky, even the common little red seeds that the children play with pray at the feet of the Lord and participate in the festival. Even the large copper vessels in which the offerings to the deity are prepared become important characters in the scene because of their vivid presence.

To prepare the offerings
For the Lord of Guruvayoor
Those who suffered the heat of the fire
As if they were poised in the lotus pond

In dedication and prayer
Free of desires
Pure at heart,
These copper vessels.

The poet wanders about the temple seeing to his heart's content the Lord who from the first puja early in the morning to the last one after dinner, remains in the sanctum sanctorum donning dresses appropriate for each occasion.The poet enjoys the sight of the different auspicious spots in the premises. The subsidiary deities like Sastha and Ganapathi, the damsels of the land of mountains who worship Krishna with love like Gopis and adoration like his foster mother Yashoda catch his eye. In the midst of all this the poet draws our attention to some interesting sights. At the eastern gate, feeding the first morsel of rice to her first child in front of the holy lamp a mother prays to the Lord:

May the rice of life
Be nectar for my child
Please protect
Your little child.

The elephant is the centre of devotion when he carries the sacred image of the Lord. But when the image is taken down he becomes an ordinary beast.

Comes out, lo! Suffering
The cruel lash of his keeper,
Shedding sad tears,
Shivering with fear.....
Once the sacred image is taken down.

Like the elephant carrying the image of the Lord, when he carries divine poetry the poet turns into God. When the deity is taken down he once again turns into an ordinary mortal. Then the world laughs at him contemptuously, and subjects him to torture. When P. talks about the elephant he is actually etching a self-portrait.

In the poet's imagination the seven-day reading of the sacred Bhagavatam is restaged. Seeing the antics and tantrums of the young Krishna with the mind's eye the poet attains bliss. He imagines that famous devotees like Poonthanam, Melpathoor, Vilvamangalam, Kurooramma and Vazhakunnam are standing around him. While watching this festival the truth slowly unfolds itself before him. The truth that every living soul bound by the limitations of time and space journeys through life in search of the Universal soul - the truth that what shines lustrously in the sanctum sanctorum is that very Universal soul.

The puja after dinner concluded and the doors of the temple closed. The lamps went out one by one. The whole temple is in a state of deep meditation. Only the poet is around, unable to sleep. Full of the memory of the ecstasy

of seeing God face to face, he wanders in the moonlight around the temple pond. The poet knows well that the next morning when he steps out of the precincts, he will once again become mere P. Kunjiraman Nair. So he wails heartbroken:

Like camphor in fire,
Salt in water, anon
Till this mountain of ignorance
That I am withers into nothingness

The seven syllables of the Lord's name
May they dawn on the tongue
Of this blinded worm
That is me.

The name of the Lord of Guruvayoor was on P.'s tongue till the day of his death. What we usually see in the world is that as devotion grows, desires wane. But in P's case what happened was that his desires flourished as his devotion grew. His was a life condemned to be lived in the acute suffering caused by the inner conflicts that this contradiction generated.

P.'s long poem, Premapournami, is in celebration of sacred love that is beyond caste and religion, time and clime. A Hindu youth named Ajayan falls in love with a Muslim girl named Ayesha. Their families as well as the local community oppose their marriage. Ajayan's father tries to persuade him to back off. Although Ajayan agrees under pressure to withdraw and go to the temple to make amends, the next moment he thinks of Ayesha, forgets everything else and sets out to seek her. In the meantime Ayesha manages to evade the efforts of her family to get her married to a rich man. However, some conspirators set fire to her house. When Ajayan arrives, he finds her trapped in the burning

house. He rescues her from the fire. Thus they are united in the end, against all odds.

The theme of *Premapournami* gives abundant scope for dramatic scenes. But the poet's attention is not on the dramatic possibilities. P. narrates the episodes of the young man's father's efforts to dissuade him from pursuing his love, the rich man's efforts to win Ayesha's hand, Ayesha's rejection of the suitor and the rescue of Ayesha from the fire by Ajayan in a few simple stanzas. On the other hand he chooses to dwell on the lofty love that rises to spiritual heights discarding material considerations. More than living individuals, Ajayan and Ayesha are embodiments of eternal love. Naturally enough the scenes of Vrindavan, the Kalindi River and the love of Radha and Krishna come rushing into our minds. The love story of Ajayan and Ayesha breaks all the conventions of the eternal waiting and anxieties of lovers and ends in the union of the two. P. describes Ayesha waiting for Ajayan:

With streaming tears to wash the feet,
Blooming flowers for puja to love,
To bid welcome to my guest
I wait in the hermitage of my heart.

The agonies of the waiting are reflected in nature.

Verily for the puja of her lord,
With her tray full of flowers that are stars,
From the peaks of the blue mountain,
Through the gracious array of clouds
Silently down comes the beauteous damsel
Slowly, gently the dark night.

The gentle gait of the dark night is sure to remind the reader of Radha waiting for her Krishna in Vrindavan. This is how great poets give shape and language to the moods that are ever dormant in our subconscious mind.

The love between man and woman for P. is not mere union of two minds and two bodies. It is the meeting mingling and merging of two souls. This naturally leads the way to love of all creation living and inanimate and to love of God. That is how it evolves into spirituality. P. believes that traversing the path of love one arrives at the temple of ultimate liberation. P demonstrates the oneness that lovers feel with everything in nature:

Seeing the dark eyes of the deer,
Her pregnancy gone ten months, I sigh.
The little birds waiting for the mother, who is gone,
Bring tears to my eyes
The creeper I gently pat and console
Her tree of sweet mango gone for ever
The heart becomes restless seeing the flower
That the bee has left after sucking her honey.

Transcending the dark alleys of lust, the lovers burst into the light of true love and dance in joyous abandon. Premapournami ends with such a scene.

This river of pure fragile love
A small stream taking off
When heaven and earth
Are united in a melodious hum

As the thin moonlight kisses
Will with a gentle gurgle

Merge in sinless freedom
In absolute perfection.

There were many sides to the world of P.'s ideals. He wrote *Sriramacharitam* and *Varabhiksha* to give expression to the idea of a land of truth and freedom that was his vision. When he wrote *Ananthankad* and *Bhadradeepam* he had his vision of ultimate liberation in his mind. It was in his search for his land of love and freedom that he found the theme of Premapournami. Truth, liberation and love merge together at one point. That indeed is the central point of P's life as well as poetry.

Poems

Do not fly off, honey bee,
You have played about in valleys
That have many verities of honey.
So what? The ultimate sweetness,
The honey that you can have
The extreme pleasure it gives
It takes you to peace without bounds
With the flower of deep hue in the heavens.
Will you lift us on your wings
And take us there too?

(Vyloppilly)

Though P. always claimed that he had written over fifty thousand poems, all that we have with us are around 1300 poems. One of his regular tricks was to include the same poems in more than one collection. In most of his published collections there were just four or five new poems. The rest were poems that had already been published in earlier collections. He has also played the trick of publishing the same collection under a new title. For example the poems in the collection published in 1944 under the title *Niramala* and the ones in *Mankudathinte Vila,* a collection published in 1961 are the same. It was *Mullathara* a collection of poems that was published in 1938 that again appeared in 1965 with the title changed into *Malanadinte Mahasandesam*. Again the anthology *Anthithiri* published in

1957 made a second appearance in 1963 under the title *Soundaryadevata.* Thus when we eliminate the repetitions, we are left with about six hundred original poems. If we were to give credence to the poet's claim of having written fifty thousand poems, we have to presume that we have lost in the tide of time the vast majority of the poems that he wrote. Young researchers ought to come forward to scan all the periodicals published between1920 and 1970 and retrieve as many of P.'s poems as possible.

As things are we can only lament the loss of many of the works of this great poet. However, from what we have got we can confidently say that P. was a poetic personality of colossal intellect and force who shined lustrously in the world of Malayalam poetry in the twentieth century

P.'s poetry can be compared only to a great temple. Great towers at the four gates. The walls full of sensuous sculptures of men and women in erotic abandon. Beyond that you enter the peripheral structure and the path for circumambulation. You see the narrow entrance to the sanctum sanctorum. It is a stagnant pool of unhappiness, sense of guilt and repentance. It is only through deep sea, through roaring flames that you may find your way to the sanctum sanctorum.

Though truly
There is not much distance
Between the inner sanctum
And the flag mast of gold

To get near you
We climb many a volcano
To touch your feet
We swim across many a sea.

When you get through all these travails and reach the inner sanctum you see endless light there –Truth, Knowledge and Bliss. It is the ultimate liberation.

Sprinkling golden pollen
On the petals
Of the blooming lotus of the dawn,
With the aura of tinkling golden anklets

Wafting clear rays fresh
Of pure knowledge sprouting
Melding the notes of the lute made of ruby
That is indeed the sacred Om

Immersing the dark horizon
In glorious crimson
Waking up the notes of music
That are in the stone and the thorn.

Imparting the aura
Of poetic imagination to drops of water
There she sparkles with a gentle smile,
The ultimate truth, knowledge and bliss.

(Soundaryapuja)

In short Kunjiraman Nair's poetry is a passage from sensuousness through sorrow to liberation. Darkness, dusk and light are his three precepts governing time.

Love and nature dominate all his early works. Later on love turns into devotion and nature into God. The background of almost all his love poems is the area around the Nila River that captivated him in the days of adolescence. P. wandered along the banks of Nila enjoying the natural beauty of the country side and the favours of the country damsels. Nila itself becomes his beloved:

Alas! I have fallen in love
With Nila, the village damsel.

Nature served a feast of pleasure to his senses. The damsels gave him both gratification and pain. In one sense, all P's loves were declarations of independence breaking the chains

into which he had been put by the domineering father figure who seemed to impose limitations on his imagination. He describes the blissful world of the poet and his love:

> The gentle breeze of the season of Athira,
> I should caress the ringlets on her forehead,
> Should sip the glorious dusk
> That pours the juice of grapes into the coconut shell,
> Decorate with jasmine buds the dark hair of the night
> Whose face is the full moon
> Fall into the chair in soaring mirth
> Build fortresses in the sky with the smoke of hopes.
> No, I cannot follow the footsteps of my guru
> And damn this life that is rendered soft by art.
>
> (Kaliyachchan)

While immersed in his pleasures a deep sense of guilt haunts him. He had come away seeking a world of his own defying and forsaking his father who had taken loving care of him for years. Hence he felt that all the pleasures of love were tainted by sin. He had rejected his father. He could not go back to him. Therefore all that was left for him to do was to lose himself in the pleasures of love. He realizes this with immense pain.

> I greedily consume, this mixture of pleasures and sorrow
> That is served up by the array of false shadows.
>
> (Cinema Kazhinjal)

It is not only the poet's sense of guilt that turns his love-life into an agony. Over time, slowly he understands that his love whom he considered as the store house of all beauty and virtue is just an ordinary woman who is in no way free from the usual mixture of likes and dislikes, jealousy, selfishness and ego. Being of a practical turn of mind she rejects him. Or the poet is forced to leave her. In any case he loses both

his father and his love. What follows is a journey with no one on whom he can rely. It is during this journey that he runs in to God who is a father to all. Every sinner can seek refuge at his feet (Perumkaliyachchan). There was no further hesitation. The poet sets out seeking the golden temple of that God.

What fills all P's poems is a melancholy that is at once sweet and indistinct. Most of his poems have been written in a mood of rumination, long after the bliss that he enjoyed in nature and in his loves had vanished, never to reappear. Even while blindly loving his beloved, he is plagued by the sad thought that he will have to leave her soon. Rejected by his beloved, living all alone, he remembers the happy days that he spent with her and his mind fills with a sweet sensation. In short his love poems present a world that is a mixture of thrills and miseries.

He describes the alternating experiences of bliss and agony through the ever changing moods of natural phenomena. For P. nature is as alive as man. He says to the tribal girl who entertained him with her beautiful songs:

Like the crescent that glides down
From the bank of the brook that is the dusk
Give me the essence of happiness, as much as you can
Mistress of the wine-house of music and poetry.

Here nature and the damsel lose their separate identities. It is not a comparison of one with the other. They are one. As N.V.Krishna Warrier says, in P.'s puja, "the Puja, the one that is worshiped and the materials for the puja get mixed up".

Even long after his beloved has forsaken him the pangs of separation instead of abating recur with ever increasing force. The poet lives entirely in his memories.

Why did we have to meet,
Only to separate?
Why did we have to come close
Only to move apart?

(Manju Poya Mazhvillu)

Whither gone the flowery creepers,
Whither the melody of the songs,
Whither the flashes of dreams in my heart
Whither the angels of my fancy?

(Njangal Varunnu)

The wick of the lamp has burned out, and the garland
That I made, my dear, has withered away.

(Pranaya Pratheeksha)

Like the enchanting glow of moonlight.
Though you will not ever come again,
I shall wait with a little lamp
On the other bank of the river of death in flood.

(Nee Varilla)

Sitting on the same branch, for a while we made friends,
and then fought
Pecked each other and went our ways like birds with
feathers in five colors.

(Athiranilav)

The movie has vanished, the lute is shattered
The bowl of flowers crashed among the thorns,
Still even to day, the mind wanders in the land of dreams
Where the river of milk sings
And the bed of sand is spread.

(Uthradarathri)

On the hallowed waves of this river in autumn,
The small boat with the sails spread wide
When the moon is full, my mind
Becomes perfect with the sighs of memories.

(Soundaryadevata)

For P., love is the unconditional union of two souls. It is not an act of receiving, but of giving. Love is not selfishness, it is sacrifice. When love has a selfish purpose, it is just lust. All such relationships get muddied by sin. There the beloved turns into a slut or a witch. When rejected by such a woman, P.'s mind gets filled by the memories of his father whom he had rejected. Guilt and remorse lead him to self deprecation that verges on self flagellation. The poet recognizes the breach of vow that he has committed.

> Didn't someone catch you in the hook of a long glance,
> And enslave you and make you break your vow?
>
> (Akkarakku)

> The mother sighing, you pushed out of doors
> And installed the slut in your house.
>
> (Premapuja)

> The wind that had lost his youth,
> The flower returned his love letter.
> The dusk pushed out the sun who was old
> And banged the door shut.
>
> (Pichicheendiya Pushpachakram)

Piranna Mannil is a work that tells the story of the poet's deep feeling of guilt and intense remorse. The poet's theme here is his return journey in search of his parents and village of birth that he had lost long ago by his own act of rejection. The village of his birth is the very source of love, affection and sense of security. Having spent seven years in the pursuit of sensuous pleasures in alien lands, the poet plagued by nostalgia is on his way back home.

He had lost everything because of his irrepressible desires. He was in deep misery. He who had left his village in the dark night with a life that wore the handcuffs of death is received back by his village like the sacred name of the Lord that brings light into the night. When stepping on to the

sacred soil of the village he feels a pervasive thrill. He feels that all his sins have been washed away. Because:

In these beautiful grains of sand,
A magnet lies hidden.
In this well with its broken steps
There is holy water to the brim.

And then:

This soil and this sand renew
The sacred atoms of life.
The cool waves of breeze from the sea
Hug my life force close and tight.
The skies raining boundless affection
Place hands on my head and bless me.

Father is there in the house - father who brought him up with love and affection and at the same time controlled and imprisoned him in his will. Father protects; but he demands subordination. The son is not prepared to be submissive. So he forsakes the security and leaves in search of freedom. Having wandered all over the country deeply immersed in lust and sin he returns full of remorse. When he falls at the feet of his father he regains the purity that he had forfeited.

When we read this poem along with Kaliyachchan, one of the poet's famous works, one thing becomes clear. What P seeks to depict through his images of father and son and Guru and disciple is nothing but the relation between man and God. Man ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge against the wishes of God. He was banished from heaven. But he was able to create a world of his own independent of God. He enjoyed the boundless bliss of freedom.

But at the same time he fell into the grip of unbearable loneliness and sense of insecurity.

It became necessary for him to regain his sense of security even by sacrificing his freedom. That is how he comes to

confess to all his sins and seek refuge at the feet of his God. God took away his freedom. In return he gave him security. But not much time passed before man scorning the security challenged his god and leaving him once again set out in search of the world of freedom. Alternating hunger for security and thirst for freedom is a recurring feature of man's story. What Kunjiraman Nair did soon after falling at his father's feet and confessing all his transgressions was to forsake his father and catch a train to the south, once again in search of his pleasures.

In this poem not only his father, but also his mother appears. In P.'s poetry as well as in his life the mother figure is an important character. She provides him with security. But she does not demand subordination. The picture of his mother that he paints is that of a goddess.

In front of the lamp with five wicks
The flames not flickering one bit in the breeze
Beautiful eyes closed in yogic pose
Mother sits in deep meditation.

As in his childhood even in his old age she smothered him with love. She fed her son who had returned from distant places with conji made of seasoned grain. She gave him pure milk that was white as the moonlight of the festive season. On his mother's death, overwhelmed by sorrow he writes in his poem *Ambala Mottinte Pattu:*

Hands that knew my thirst and gave me water,
Knew my hunger and served me food
Have gone; the hands of the goddess who strew
Flowers of benediction along your empty path.
This life thirsts for a drop-
Drop from the jar of sacred love.
Serve me the gruel of compassion
Oh, mother, with a grain of the salt of the earth.

The woman of P.'s poetic world is a grand amalgam of the beloved, the slut, the witch, the mother, the goddess and poetry itself. The beloved gives him the bliss of unconditional love. The slut and the witch tempt him with lust and false promises of love, drag him along the sordid path of desire and sin and destroy him. The mother saves him and gives him love and protection. And the goddess shows him the path of grace and knowledge and leads him by hand to the land of redemption. Saraswathi, the goddess of wisdom, Durga the goddess of retribution and Lakshmi the goddess of abundance unite and become one in P's conception of goddess. P.'s poetry, his eternal virgin is merely a means of finding his way to that goddess who is the very embodiment of eternal bliss. When the means and the end merge, the poet, his poetry and his goddess become one. In that zone of non-duality, there are no waves, only the ocean, no dimensions, only infinity, no time, only eternity.

Raise your head and look upwards,
It is infinity all over,
Infinity that is waiting to gather
You into its arms and kiss you.

(Poomottinte Kani)

Do not ask about the identity of each wave that comes,
Meditate on the ocean of which you cannot see the shore.

(Kinavile Kanyaka)

I dance seeing myself not as a mere wave,
But as the endless ocean.
I dance in awareness of the eternal truth
That you father and I are one and the same.

(Kochu Narthaki)

The little blade of grass and the man who dies
When you learn that they are members of the family that is the Universe,
You who are a spec of froth in the ocean that is beyond comprehension,
When you learn that you are a part of indivisible infinity,
The Himalaya will melt into the stillness of meditation
That sings into your ears the story of your soul
That has broken through the realms of the sun and the moon
And attained the effervescent glory of deathlessness.
Your story, the eternal story.

(Chandradarsanam)

The goal of P.'s poetry was the realization of god at the personal level. At the social and cultural level the aim was to resurrect the glory and authenticity of the culture of Kerala and India. The world of P.'s ideal was an imaginary paradise that consisted of Kerala with her seasons of planting and transplantation, the festivals of the New Year, traditional agricultural practices, folk arts and handicrafts and an India that had its foundations in truth and Dharma. He always kept one foot in that ideal world of his even while the other was planted firmly in the world of current realities. He believed that a paradise had been lost and that the purpose of the struggle for independence was to regain it. In that world people live in peace and amity without differences of religion and caste quietly going about their work. There are no fights, no murkiness, no enmities and no jealousy. What P expected from the independence of the country was the establishment of the realm of his vision. When the temples

were thrown open to all castes in 1935, P. wrote in ecstasy:

The Ganga and the dark Kalindi have united
The Brahmin and the Pariah embrace each other
A million faces awash with tears
God from the granite prison has been set free.
(Kshetrapravesanaganam)

P. had visualized the establishment of a post independent India that would uphold the identity of the cultures of Kerala and India. But what happened in reality was different. Our system of education was brought even closer to the Macaulay model. English, a foreign language was placed above the mother tongue and Sanskrit, the language of the gods. Agriculture and handicrafts were ruined. Villages turned into towns. Corruption and graft were nationalized. Nature was looted. P. considered it his mission to fight against these proclivities with his pen, the only weapon that he had. When he wrote poems about the mother tongue and the conservation of nature he had a grand idea in his mind – the establishment of the blessed nation of his vision. For P. his language and nature were much the same as the mother that gave him his birth.

Day after day wearing these borrowed spectacles
Oh, architects of the government,
Are you fashioning out of this beautiful white clay
The image of the white monkey?
With this thread that is our very veins
Are you weaving foreign garments?
Are the fumes of poison from the rotting carcasses
Of native languages meant to eradicate germs of disease?
(Kadalalkalude Sandesam)

Even the question of giving a little water to one's mother
These people make the subject of an enquiry

And these eminent people strut before the world
Donning the stinking old coat of the white man.

(Mangalasamsa)

Where the mother tongue has no place
That land is a corpse, subjugated, even if it breaths.

(Mangalasamsa)

This great Bharat that had a culture
That nourished the whole world, if she is to live again,
In your heart that is ready to flower
Plant education that makes man out of man.

(Pavangalude Daivom)

P. saw that if the rhythm of the organic world is broken it would lead to ruination. When the Malampuzha dam was constructed the thinkers and artists saw it as proof of man's capacity to control nature and use her to serve his purposes. But P. saw it differently.

The charred skeletons of the beautiful damsels of the forest
Lie scattered.

That was a time when most people harboured the false notion that they lived in a world of which man was the centre and that man had every right to control and enslave nature for his comforts. When the son drains lifeblood from the breast of the mother who feeds him milk, the mother dies. The son dies too. To the present generation that is aware of this truth, the words of P who felt pain and anger on seeing the destruction of nature will sound prophetic.

To the flower with the indelible aura of smile,
To the bird that ever pours out the nectar of song,
To the tree that holds up as an umbrella for the world
The prosperity that it gained through its own effort,
Let man who tom toms that he is the noblest of creations
In public, tender apology.

(Kabirinte Prardhana)

The overgrown edges of the path
The basil and other aromatic shrubs
Who are relations wont to mourn each other's death,
Turned their faces away seeing my shadow in the distance.

(Hotelum Vadakamuriyum)

P. had to leave this world without attaining his much desired land of freedom. But he truly believed that man was destined to be born again and again in this world and was hopeful that one day or the other he would find his way to that temple of true light, eternal and pure.

Oh, you light! When I take one step towards you,
You dash off to the distance.
Till I die, I shall try to tame you
With faith and spirituality.

(Velichathilekku)

In short, what P. tries to convey to us through his terminology of love, separation, guilt, remorse, devotion and hunger for freedom using the media of nature, man and God, is nothing but his philosophical conundrums of existence and the Universe.

We will conclude this chapter by quoting P's reply to the question, "Who is a poet?"

"An Indian poet must be a sage. He should be a philosopher. He should be a prophet who has the halo of the presence of God in him. He must be a great man who encompasses the heart of all that exists. It doesn't take a poet to depict experience, one's own experience, what one has seen with the material eye. For that any man will do. Only one who can process the experience of the world and make it into his own experience can be a poet. Distant from everything, in the faraway polar luminosity, as a universal witness, detached, observe the world as you see a museum. He who as a mere witness watches minutely all that is

created getting caught in the current of time and rushing to the ocean of death – he is the poet.

He should grow until he becomes the universe itself.
The native place of one who has thus grown?
The blue sky.
House?
The abode of the rising sun.
His writing pad?
The world of the moon.
Pen?
The ray of the sun.
Inkpot?
The ocean.
Silver coin?
The stars.
Relations?
All creation.
Poems?
The flowers that bloom each day.
Friends?
The birds that sing.
Farmland?
The sunrise and the sunset.
Guard at his door?
Time.
His carpet?
The earth.
Library?
This wonderful universe.

Supplement 1

The mud pond and some lotus flowers

(P. Kunjiraman Nair)

Love is the penance of the rishi,
The devotee's puja – the ascetic's pilgrimage.
Pouring milk white moonlight on one burning in the heat,
Love is not begging – it is the act of giving away everything.

The mud pond and the lotus flowers! The thorny rose bush and the soft luscious rose flower, the black face of the rock and the spring of clear water, the silent sky and the torrential rain that turns land into sea, the cock that wakes up by itself and the trumpet of the new dawn – that is the poet and his poetry.

There can be no lotus in a pond that has dried up. There can be no poetry in a heart devoid of love.

The perfume of the lotus that blooms in the lustre of love – that is poetry. Poetry is the ideation of the drop of dew that sparkles in the shining light of divine love.The heart that has forsaken darkness and aggression and filled itself with virtuous love – that white lotus is the golden throne of the muse of poetry.

Universal love, ideal love in a fountain of beauty – that is the source of poetry.

Over a long time a bud grows slowly and blooms into a flower, the sprout of a plantain leaf opens out its green silk, the cloud sprinkles its cool drops – like that slowly, slowly a poem is born. Nothing in the universe, inner or outer is

born in a trice. Even instant poetry is the child of earlier sedimentation of thoughts and feelings. The laws of nature rule everywhere without partiality. Only a man who has a fat bank balance can write a fat cheque at short notice.

Nature, the Universe, that mine of precious stones that is never exhausted gives me inspiration. The immortal Sanskrit literature of India too prompts my mind.

My life is the sweet agony of the loss of an empire. My poetry is my dedicated attempt to regain it.

The core mantra of this beating heart is divine love. I wrote these lines early in my life:

In this vast world,
The child knows only its mother.
The lady holds in her mind
Only the face of her lover.
The beauteous rose
Knew only about the glorious dawn.
The syllables of the word "Love"
Are all that there is in my language.

The holy stream of divine life flows through the folksongs of the land that gave me my birth. The Mahout pats the sharp tusks of the elephant that refuses to eat and says "I will not eat anything till you have your food".

The snake charmer resurrects through the power of his mantra the snake that died when he drained out his poison and gives him an egg to eat and milk to drink. The snake raises its hood and swings in good cheer. The snake charmer tells him, "Now, my friend, go and meet your wife and children."

The philosophy of non-duality that taught us that even plants, blades of grass and worms are members of our own family – that is the foundation of the edifice of my poetry.

This basic emotion of adoration evolved into devotion, love, compassion. Yes, it became compassion and then moral indignation and flowed as the inner stream of my poetry.

As the immortal voice of the letter that is the soul
As a gift of enduring patrimony
Come, you compassion
That oozes from a heart that is large.

The mind longs to wander about as a sightseer, as a tourist in this crowded market that is busy bargaining.

My imagination longs to observe this universe like a cinema, a play, a museum – detached and untouched.

Behind his poetry every poet has a vision of life, a point of view that is different from that of others. This adherence to ideals that are all his own, gives a unique shape and glow to his creations.

Like the lightning behind the rain, every poem is preceded or accompanied by a momentary urge or provocation. One cannot remember all this and tell the stories behind them.

The hidden secrets of the heart of poetry are like those of our journey through this world – that emerges out of the unknown and traversing from the unknown to the unknown vanishes altogether.

Unlike the spectator on the beach, the man who sinks in the water sees nothing. Only one with a mind that is detached and untouched can enjoy seeing this great drama.

My definition of a poet is this – then, now and for ever. He who as a mere witness watches minutely all that is created getting caught in the current of time and rushing to the ocean of death – he is the poet – poetry is the ideation of that poetic experience.

There may be certain incidents or experiences that led one to write certain poems. Let me tell you about one or two of them.

Attakai

(The Desperate Measure)

It happened about a dozen years ago. I was living in Thiruvambadi in Trichur. The main occupation was writing poetry. A small rented house. I had a reclining chair. Tea every now and then. Frequent pan and beedi. Days when I was living as a family man with the support of a country wench. Go on writing away. Write away day and night. That was the way it was. No temple, no devotion, no bath, no worship. Only poetry. Like unceasing waves poetry crashed into the shores. Intoxication. Day and night. The intoxication of poetry.

My mate shouldered all the responsibilities of running the home. There were buffaloes, cows, and calves. They ran about the compound and sometimes trespassed into the house. Plenty of pure milk. Above all the poetry that oozed out at all times like the udder of the Karachi cow.

In a short while this idyllic life went to pieces. The buffaloes disappeared. The cows dried up and one by one they were sold.

Only one calf, a handsome male was left. He ate when I ate and even had a little coffee with me now and then. He would curl up quietly near my reclining chair – chewing the cud.

I still remember the large blue eyes. In dire need of money, one day late in the evening I sold him. Attakai is about that tragic episode.

No, I cannot bear to remember that; the day when the darling
Was no longer in the shed - Vishu festival without laburnum.

He has a princely dimple on his shoulder;
This house shall not see want when he is there.
I shudder again and again in memory
Come and rub against this chest lean and pale!
It will take the hearts of a thousand Buddhas
To understand the mute pains of the tribe of quadrupeds.
Carrying loads for selfish people
In agony without closing the eyes even once, one behind the other
Foaming at the mouth with white blood
The cruel whips playing on your backs
Drawing again and again the picture
Of man's cruelty to poor dumb animals,
Let me ask aloud once,
Let the lord ask aloud,
What wrong has he done to mankind?

Man's cruelty to nature, his wrath towards the elements – these have always been subjects of my poetry. Even after writing a thousand poems in protest, that moral indignation remains with me. His violent will, devilish cruelty roams the earth, the seas and the sky like a cobra, its hood open and raised. There is no escape for the trees, plants, the oceans and its denizens and the skies and its inhabitants from the aggression of this creature with certain special capabilities. The world of forests, animals, birds and trees perish right in front of our eyes. The sea, the streams, the rocks and even the soil has no security. With the hand that was given to him to soothe others he batters everything in the name of science.

Who is the enemy?

This land of truth and non-violence has turned into the land of untruth and violence. Gandhi has become 'government Gandhi.' The celebration of his centenary turned out to be a cheque-writing extravaganza for millionaires.

The country's freedom of which a set of jackals make a feast! Freedom for robber chiefs. Slavery for the poor – all this touched my heart and became raw materials for my poems. Gaining possession of the keys to the treasury, people pretend to be in charge and ruin the country. The injustice that pervades the country is something that god cannot forbear. *Narabali* is my fierce protest against this. The enemy in it is not the Chinese. He is the Indian of today. I have poured out in a hundred thousand lines my strong opposition to the violence that drives a fatal knife into the blood vessels of the law of universal love and the laws of the universe.

Kadal Nayat

Just like the range of blue mountains, the shore of the blue sea and the beaches with their sand that is white as sugar, the shade of the coconut tree, the cool breeze and the life that the silent millions lead in the midst of all this have ever been favourite subjects that have touched my heart.

It was more than two decades ago that I went to Edappalli to meet the poet Changampuzha. Since I didn't find him there I went to Kochi in search of him. He was not there either. I wandered about the beach along the place where the backwaters meet the sea. There were fishing boats not far from the beach. There were piles of silvery fish here and there. Silvery fish that bounced and wriggled.

The sight stirred me strongly. My mind became a sea of tears. As time passed, the fish piles and the seashore of

Kanjangad got welded together in my mind. Those fish were the people of Kochi. The sea and the sea shore were the people of Kanjangad.

This poem to which no reviewer drew attention and which has not been noticed by many of my readers is dear to me as life itself.

At the reception at the Muthalmada High School, this became clear.

Some artistic girls presented it musically. That day Kollamkod Balan master, a card player whom I never liked, became my beloved friend because he had found the poem and arranged for its presentation. Memory of that scene still sends thrills down my spine. I realized that those lines contained the roar of the sea in the land of mountains. Excuse me. I will recite a few lines – from the songs of the fishermen.

Far away I saw the Lord reclining on the snake
That dances with a thousand hoods.
Wrapped in the blanket of the ecstasy of the cool
Drooling profusely, the old uncle, the wind
Came to the fishing village and said,
Do obeisance to the Lord that gives you your daily grub
In the last watch of the night as the moonlight begins to fade, the boat moves:
In the dim moonlight of the month of Aries
The night playing the role of the shade of coconut trees,
Ere the honey in the bunches of flowers on the mango tree
Melts into the song of the nightingale,
Come along to move this golden boat
That fell asleep hugging the shore
To the outer sea that lies asleep

Hugging the memory of the shore, the hills,
The high hill that is a fiery wave
The coconut trees and the mountains.
Verily this simple minded lord of the sea
Is like a little child in his ways.
It is good cheer all through to day
The lord of the sea will playfully rock these boats
In hands that can shatter big ships.
You can see the golden flag mast
Of the chariot in which the lord of the earth arrives.

(This is about the glow of the early dawn that the fishermen see on the shore in the east.)

Having done penance in the woods on the mountain
Where crimson flowers bloom in abundance,
In the aura of renunciation
Rises the sun, the rubies of his rays
Come pouring down
Pausing for a while on the blue mountains
And plunge into the glow of the clouds
Shading the blue waters of the sea with their crimson.
To the sight of them visiting the grandfather,
The sea, his aged body in shivers
With the load of what they have gathered
Quietly waits at the far end the blue mountain
Ever beautiful, ever true.

The poems of the sea that have been washed ashore –
Ha!

As if caressing the holy footprints
Of the great Buddha,
They bounce about for a while
And fall asleep on the white sand
Their strength sapped for ever.

The hum of the sea
Whispers in the ear
That this sin is cruel indeed.

The Kali of the fishermen's shrine shouted at them:

Kill your own young ones
And eat them!
Stop this horrid hunt.
As the sun rises tomorrow
Take up the spade and the plough.

About the daughters of the fishermen who stand gazing at the incoming boats:

Watching out for the buds that bloom
On the branches of the tree that is the sea
Wait in eagerness in the distance
The thatched huts, hearts in which dwells Kali.

Looking out for the boats that proclaim
The birth of happiness, the nascent baby,
Winking the blue eyes that are like
Lotus flowers full of honey
Donning the flowers of the pineapple tree
The damsels of the fisher folk
Sway gently like blue sugarcane.

In the sizzling sand:

'Seeing the beauty that faded and extinguished
We felt a pang in our minds.'

The little girl called Nangeli burst out crying:

We go to the bazaar and pile up these sins.
In silken clothes comes the town
To fling new money at us and snatch them.
Oh, you born in the womb of the sea
That bore the nine jewels,
Bearing torture and excesses
You died in millions.

You nourish still with no qualms
The poison plant that is man's body.
The golden anklets of the daughter of the ocean of milk
We were shown when they got ashore from the sea
And changed into silver and gold,
Into the golden thread around the bride's neck
And the little bell for the child's waist.
On the mainland you built mansions snow white
Your indelible poems that end sadly;
Pictures of tortures done by man
Necklaces made of pearls of tears.
We offer you our thanks.

In those days when Gandhiji was with us I had the courage to write this. To day I would be scared to pen it.

Nevertheless, someone whispers in my ears, 'Even against the roaring laughter of violence, you sing your song of love, you play your flute.' When touched by the ray of poetry the mind – that drop of dew – turns into diamond.

The infant that just for a moment lies suckling on the lap, the shy bride who feels the touch of her lover on the first

night, the flowering tree to whom the spring comes running to hug –That is the mind that has been kissed by poetry.

Those days when the mind had migrated to the polar star are over. The time when it rode the silver cloud is gone. Today it is busying itself in little practical tasks to eke out a living on this earth bedeviled by rubble and thorns. I wrote poetry in a rented room; in weariness I scribble something sitting on a bench in a corner.

Poet, Poetry

Poetry without the odour of staleness, poetry that you can read again even if you have read it many times – that is what I call poetry. There are such pieces in my godown too. I am sure that one day they will be seen by eyes that have not been afflicted by cataract.

When touched by the ray of poetic imagination the mind turns into a rainbow. Inside and outside poetry flows grazing both the banks. I believe that poetry is the poetry that gushes, not the poetry that is written. Is there a current in which forgetting the world, forgetting the body, forgetting everything even the poet himself is swept away? Many have asked me. Yes, my friend, there is such a current. It is leaping water that you cannot stop – not the dribble from a pipe – clear water that never dries up. Vishnunarayanan who sleeps well every night forgetting everything asks, 'is there a state like that when you forget everything?' Yes, there is. There is a state of poetic meditation in which even ice that is as frozen and firm as the Himalayas will melt and flow. If it is not there, you must make it. Make it.

The yogi's seat of meditation. The Rishi's seat of meditation. Just a step below that the poet too has a seat of meditation covered with flowers. The poet's eye that is at the heart of all creation, the third eye, the eye of divine imagination is opened there. On that seat the poet grasped the story of Ramayana that was yet to take place in reality as clearly as his own palm and wrote it. There is a poem by Bhojaraja that asserts this fact. That poem is my torch.

I who have finished my role in the play and am sitting in the greenroom chewing my pan heave sighs thinking about my poems published in periodicals that have not been collected and preserved. The thousands of ideas that came to me in a flash that I failed to copy down on paper, those poems that came sighing and knocked at my door that I in my torpor of sleep failed to open and turned back offended, those village girls – my mind burns in a slow fire when I think of them.

Today having lost everything at the hands of thieving men and thieving women and battered by violence and exhausted I lie on this jungle road lit by the dim light of the dusk. Planting my eyes on the evening star that I see in the distance through the arch of the fallen tower of my imagination's empire, I heave deep sighs in utter loneliness.

Supplement 2

Kavisallapam

Akkitham : Namaskaram. It is but rarely that one gets to see you. Even then, before one can snatch a second look you disappear. Today I won't let you off. I have some questions. I have a request to P. Kunjiraman Nair that he should impart some meaning to those questions.

P : You know that in the usual course I am pure trouble. All the same you may ask your questions.

Akkitham : Does Kunjiraman Nair enjoy writing poetry?

P : This is a question that I have put several times to the rose bud. I have asked the nightingale of early summer. Also the ocean in the festivity of the moon.

: Is this expansion of the self a pleasure? Is this intoxication of melody pleasing? Is this tide of love enjoyable? I will repeat their reply. It is a pleasure. This alone is pleasure. Any sorrow that you may endure to attain this pleasure is pleasure too.

Akkitham : I would like to know when you started this quest of happiness.

P : In childhood that knew nothing – knew everything. May be at the age of twelve. Dark night. Torrential rain. Grandfather reading the Ramayana. The Ramacharitham song.

Those stanzas filled with sweetness melted me and led me to another world. Poetry, music. When I heard them my mind longed to forget itself and become immersed in them.

Akkitham: You said your twelfth year. What are your memories about the days of primary education?

P : I do not remember a great deal. Still I remember one thing. The mathematics class was a nightmare. I used to recite aloud the pieces of poem in the text-books in utter self-forgetfulness. That was pure excitement.

Akkitham: Which was your first poem? Where were you when you wrote it?

P : *Prakritigeetham*. That is my first poem. I didn't write it. I went about singing its lines for long. After quite some time pressed by Kuruvanthodi Sankaran Ezhuthachchan I wrote it down on a piece of paper. He published it in his magazine *Kairali*.

The Teacher

Akitham : How did it happen that the Pattambi area and the Bharatapuzha came to be the background of most of your poetry?

P : Can't quite say. Pattmbi, Punnasseri and the surrounding areas prodded my poetry awake. Bharatapuzha and its sandy banks, the small boats, the hill clad in green. The Shiva temple that sparkled at dusk with its little lamp and then vanished in a trice. The dawn that comes stepping silently, the long path, different types of travellers – all this looked like the lines of a great poem. The experience of those days is beyond words. You can read about it in my poem

Pulariyennavalodu. But that piece, I am afraid is lost somewhere!

Akkitham : It is said that you reached Pattambi as a student. Would you explain in some detail the kind of education that you got there? What did you gain as a student?

P : I spent a dozen years learning Sanskrit. First in Pattambi and then in Thanjavoor. At Pattambi under the great Punnasseri Nambi. I studied the great works in poetry and rhetorics. I still remember doing recitations sleepily and the teacher's occasional question, 'Kunjiraman! Are you sleeping?'

Akkitham : You spoke about the great Punnasseri Nambi. I would like to hear more about that blessed soul from his dear pupil.

P : That lustrous picture of his donning Rudraksha chain and sacred ash is still there in the wall painting in the inner room. From three in the morning till eight and again from five in the evening till eight he stayed in the temple of his goddess. All teaching was during the intervals. He would teach ten students ten subjects at a time tough lessons hard to grasp.

Akkitham : How far did the ambience of Thanjavoor influence you?

P : Like Bharatapuzha here, there too was a beauty to entrap me. The Kavery in her light blue sari. Kaveri that in gentle strides through the sugarcane fields moved away slowly echoing with the melodies of Thyagaraja's music. The morning on the Kavery! The moon coming up

at midnight. For two years I lived in a room in the huge building that abutted on the river. Right in those days I wrote three or four poems about her and hid them in my mind.

Akkitham: Just one question. You say that you wrote poems and kept them in your mind. Do you still have that kind of habit?

P : That is no longer possible my friend. I need pen and paper as an old man needs a staff.

The spider weaving his web

Akkitham: This process of writing poetry, is it quite a conscious process?

P : Each individual has his own way of writing poetry. I can say plainly enough about myself. As far as I am concerned it is not an altogether conscious process. From nowhere the clouds gather in the sky. Honey drips from the flower. The spider weaves his web without being quite aware of what he is doing. The creative process just happens – in dim light, thin darkness.

Akitham : It is sometimes said that literature – poetry – touches upon life. If that be so, shouldn't the poet observe the life around him? But then, if you just copy the stuff, will it be poetry?

P : The poet is no mere photographer. He is a painter. Clay becomes a beautiful pot. Mere cotton becomes soft fabric. The prickly palm leaf becomes the soft mat. It is truly the creation of a new Universe. No doubt, the poet's capital is his imagination. The cow eats dry hay and yields sweet milk. Through the poet's imagination this universe is transformed into an imaginative poem.

Akkitham : You have spoken about the eternally novel universe that is created by the poet. One point. Can you possibly say something about the inner experience of the poet who does this creation?

P : I have spoken many times about the oracle of the temples. It is the same with the postman. It is best to forget oneself. That is the secret of joy. That is the secret of art too. It is when you lose your identity that you make gains. He elevates himself in proportion to the distance that he puts between himself and this notion of 'I'. During those moments the poet is not an individual. He is pure power. Life is a great endless poem. A great poem that is eternal. The voice that speaks when the command comes to the oracle is not that of the oracle. It belongs to someone else. He turns into a flute or a pen. It is here that you get the answer to your original question. You asked whether it is a pleasure to write poetry. It is a pleasure during these moments. The photographer's dark room is the poet's workshop.

Akkittam : So you believe in the supernatural experience of the poet.

P : Isn't he called a poet precisely because he is able to encompass spiritual experience to which others have no access? He is different from others in every way – the way he sees life, his world view, his way of life, the way he sits, walks and lies down – no, that is not enough – in every little movement of his. This uncommonness, this freedom from worldliness is his hallmark. It is only while this lasts that he can write poetry. The ancient Sanskrit poetic works including the

works of Kalidasa bear witness to this. A true poet wants to live anonymously. He longs to turn each moment of his life into one of meditation for poetry. He turns this momentary transient life into immortal poetry.

Not Individual, but power

Akkitham: I will repeat in another tone a question that I asked earlier. Can a poet pretend not to notice the hopes and disappointments of contemporary life? Isn't the poet a part of the society? If a poet does not face up to such problems, won't he be turning a deaf ear to the voice of the times?

P : I have answered that earlier – that the poet is not an individual, but a force. The poet's soul is the Universal soul. His heart is the heart of the universe. His love is universal love. Let me tell you the truth, my friend. His visage is the visage of the universe. His heart beat is the heart beat of the universe. It is the heart beat of all creation. The worker who is oppressed, the draught animal toiling under its heavy load – they cause him pain. The surroundings are reflected in the stream without the stream being aware of it. Everything on all sides gets reflected in the water. But it has to be deeply sincere. There should be nothing contrived or artificial about it. If not ugliness will creep into it.

Akkitham: Do you think that poetry or the poet should have an aim or goal?

P : I will tell you in one word. I do not care if no one accepts it. Just like life, poetry too has an aim. That is this:

Take a sip and offer a sip of nectar to the world

From this bowl of death whose moment
For breaking into pieces is near at hand.

Akkitham : Do you think that the poet should be a counsellor or an adviser?

P : When one tenders advice openly, one ceases to be a poet. The best principle is:

"Like a beautiful and loving wife, say without saying."

Akkitham : Many poets have made pronouncements on how to view this world. I would like to know how you view this world.

P : One's wishes do not ever find complete fulfillment. But this is what I desire. The unknown secret, the unknown truth. The lone bird, the lazy flake of cloud soaked in tears, the distant star searching for the unknown secret and the unknown truth in total detachment, untouched by anything –that is how I would like to view nature, the world. I would like toobserve the world from a distance as a wonderful cinema, tragic drama, a museum of intellectuals.

Akkitham : Who in your opinion is a true poet?

P : The true poet is the poet defined by the Upanishads. He who shows up what is worth seeing, not he who writes about what he sees.

Akkitham : And good poetry ?

P : What poetry is there that is better than the Universe itself? Poetry that is soaked in feeling. Isn't human literature a mere lifeless transliteration of this poetry? Think of the dawn and a picture of the dawn drawn on paper.

Akkitham : Do you have any habits?

P : Yes. Mostly bad habits! But I do believe that there are some good habits too. One of them is this. I do not know what you will say. Anyway let me tell you. After everybody has gone to bed, put out the lights, go to an open place and sit in the darkness watching the stars in the blue sky. That is my favourite reading habit! I do not like to see man alone or in groups. I like to see him as a member of the family of the universe as a bit of foam in the great ocean. I like to close the external eye and see through the eyes of imagination, through the divine eye. The poet's world is the world of imagination. In the eyes of the child everything is beautiful, everything is a wonder. The blade of grass, a round pebble, a grain of sand, a feather shed by a passing bird – everything is a source of wonder. The curiosity of a little child, its irrepressible curiosity - happiness – only if the heart has these qualities one can be a poet. He turns the pebble into sugar candy, kisses the cat, picks up a burning ember, scoops up the snake – he who preserves this imagination becomes a lifelong poet.

Akkitham : I now understand your view of the world. You must have been deeply influenced by the epics and mythology of India to develop a world view on these lines.

P : The question is whether the father's blood is implicitly present in the son's blood. That is something that you know. The culture and legends of the land of a poet's birth form a part of his life breath though he may not be aware of it.

Akkitham : Another question. You have made beautiful translations of some Bengali novels – particularly those of Dwijendralal Roy. Do you know the Bengali language? What are the other languages that you know?

Poetry, my beloved

P : You know that I was born in Kanjangad. I learned Kannada in school. I translated those novels from the Kannada version with the help of a Kannada friend who knew Bengali.

Akkitham : I see. Why did you leave the place of your birth and take up more or less permanent residence in central Kerala?

P : I felt that the atmosphere in the north was not suited to a votary of literature. Kanjangad is a centre of agriculture and trade. You don't have good news papers and journals in the north. Let me give you an example. There are many poems about the festive season of Onam. The background of all these poems is central Kerala. I wrote my poems on experience gathered by observing the celebrations in central Kerala. There are many poems on the Thiruvathira festivities. These too I wrote on direct experience in central Kerala. I was born for one purpose. It was always my desire to live for that purpose and die for it. That is still my wish. Those relationships in Central Kerala that I got involved in too were because of my dream of experiencing village life directly and presenting it in my poetry. Shall I tell you the truth, my friend? In this life I have loved only one woman. Her name is poetry.

Akkitham : What have you gained from your literary life?

P : I am a person who sacrificed everything material for the sake of literary life. That is a long story. I have not made an assessment of profit and loss.

Akkitham : Many commentators and critics have opined that the undercurrent of melancholy in your poems reflect personal sorrows. Is there something that you would like to say about that?

P : Everyone may have personal sorrows. But the sad tone that you see in my poems is in no way personal. That is the desperation and unhappiness of free India. Free India that has lost its soul – at least some people will be aware that though the tone of my poetry is melancholy its soul is faith.

Akkitham : That leads to a question. You are a poet who wrote many poems during the struggle for freedom. What do you say about free India? Hope or disappointment.

P : The answer to that question is in my poems like *Narabali* and *Mathrucharanangalil*.

Akkitham : What do you have to say about the very modern Malayalam poetry that is said to be experimental and about the new writers?

P : Poetry is always poetry. This bud known as today is a continuation of yesterday. The flower known as tomorrow is a continuation of that today – the continuity of the links of a chain. Nature is change. Development is nature. Natural growth is a joy. There will always be strong people. Flowers never cease to be. They are there for ever. The soul of all art is Rasa. Beauty is the body.

Akkitham : You are a poet who has been commented upon and assessed by many in the recent past. Critics have viewed your poetry from many different angles. Let me ask you a straight question. What do you think of literary criticism in Malayalam?

P : Some one told me that Kuttikrishna Marar who was the most proficient wrestler in the arena of Malayalam literary criticism felt remorse about his antics in literary criticism in moments of lonely introspection. There are many who are yet to repent, yet to feel the prick of conscience.

Akkitham : What are your plans for the future?

P : My future plans are just this. Death! For her sake. Yes, for her. Death for the sake of poetry. Constant dying for my eternal virgin ... eternal death!

Supplement 3

P. Kunjiraman Nair's works

Poetic Works

	Poems	Year of publication	Publishers
1.	*Ankakkacha*	1936	Bharatavilasam Press. Trissur.
2.	*Anthithiri*	1957	Haji K.Ahammadkuty & Bros.
3.	*Udayasooryan*	1935	"
4.	*Onassadya.*	1960	P.K.Brothers, Calicut.
5.	*Karinthiri.*	1942	"
6.	*Kaliyachchan Adhava Anragum Aniyarayum*	1954	Sri Gurvayoorappan Book Depot, Guruvayoor.
7.	*Chandradarsanam*	1973	National Book Stall, Kottayam.
8	*Thamarathen*	1964	Current Books, Trissur.
9.	*Thamathoni*	1966	SPCS. Kottayam.
10.	*Thamaramala*	1943	P.K.Brothers, Calicut.
11.	*Thirumudimala*	1976	Guruvayoor Devaswam.
12.	*Deeparadhana*	1945	"
13	*Nirvana Nisa*	1967	Mangalodayam, Trissur.
14.	*Nakshatramala* (Part 1)	1945	Saraswati Press, Trissur.
15.	*Nakshatramala* (Part 11)	1945	"
16.	*Nirapara*	1944	P.K.Brothers, Calicut.

17.	*Niramala*	1944	"
18.	*Nisaganam*	1935	G.P.Pillai&Bros. Kollam.
19.	*Padaval*	1945	Guruvilasam, Trissur.
20.	*Padunna mantharikal*	1945	"
21	*Pathirapoov*	1934	P.K.Brothers, Calicut.
22.	*Piranna Mannil*	1963	Amala Books, Calicut.
23.	*Pookkalam*	1963	SPCS, Kottayam.
24	*Poothali*	1957	Educational Supplies. Palakkad.
25	*Poompattakal*	1952	K.T.Govindan Nambiar, Kootali.
26.	*Prapancham*	1960	Sahitya Parishad Sahakarana Sangham, Eranakulam.
27.	*Premavijayam.*	1936	Vidyavilasam, Calicut.
28.	*Balamrutham 1.*	1936	P.K.Brothers, Calicut.
29.	*Balamrutham 2.*	1957	"
30.	*Balamrutham 3.*	1957	"
31.	*Manalthariyude Chiri*	1968	Mangalodayam, Trissur.
32.	*Maniveena*	1953	K..T.G.Nambiar, Kootali.
33.	*Mankudathinte Vila*	1961	Sriramavilasam, Kollam.
34.	*Malanad*	1977	SPCS, Kottayam.
35.	*Malanadinte mahasandesam*	1965	Amina Books, Trissur.
36.	*Mullathara*	1938	P.K.Brothers, Calicut.
37.	*Yamunathadathile Smarakakshetram*	1962	"
38.	*Ratholsavam 1.*	1978	Prasanti PublicationsTrivandrum.
39.	*Ratholsavam 2.*	1978	"
40.	*Vayalkarayil*	1970	SPCS, Kottayam.
41.	*Vasantholsavam*	1973	SPCS, Kottayam
42.	*Vasanthipookkal*	1951	K.T.G.Nambiar, Kootali.
43.	*Veeraradhana*	1948	"

44.	*Sanghunadam*	1947	T.R.Ganapathy Iyer, Trissur.
45.	*Soundaryadevata*	1963	Malayala Manorama, Kottayam.
46.	*Swathanthryaganam*	1941	P.K.Brothers, Calicut.
47.	*Karpooramazha*	1994	D.C.Books, Kottayam.
48.	*Koduthu Mudinja Mavu*	1997	SPCS, Kottayam.
49.	*Neeranjanam*	1997	D.C.Books, Kottayam.
50.	*Trikkakkarakkupom Pathayetho.*	1999	Current Books, Trissur.

Long Poems

1.	*Ananthan Kattil*	1948	Keralamitram, Eranakulam.
2.	*Premapournami*	1936	Vidyavilasam, Calicut.
3.	*Bhadradeepam*	1947	Arunodayam Books, Vadakkancheri
4.	*Varabhiksha*	1933	P.K.Brothers, Calicut.
5.	*Sriramacharitham*	1933	"

Songs

1.	*Kudarmalakonki*	1945	A.R.P.Press, Kunnamkulam.
2.	*Kuttikalude Pattukal*	1956	K.R., Calicut.
3.	*Vrindavanam*	1956	Viswabharati, Calicut.

Works in Prose

Essays

1.	*Udayaragam. 1*	1933	P.K.Brothers, Calicut
2.	*Udayaragam .2*	1933	P.K. Brothers, Calicut
3.	*Prathibhankuram*	1949	Srivilas Press, Trivandrum.
4.	*Vicharaviharam. 1*	1953	K.T.G.Nambiar, Kootali.
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2.	*Upasana*	1958	P.K.Brothers, Calicut.
3.	*Karnan*	1945	Bharatavilasam, Trissur.
4.	*Karuna*	1940	"
5.	*Kalidasanum Bhavabhoothiyum*	1942	"
6	*Gurudakshina*	1943	"
7.	*Chandramandalam*	1953	Educational Supplies,Palakkad
8.	*Chandraguptan*	1944	Bharatavilasam, Trissur.
9.	*Chandakausikam*	1942	"
10.	*Charithraraksha*	1931	Sriramakrishnodayam,Olavakod.
11.	*Chidambaram Nandanarude Kathas*	1940	Sundarayyar & Sons, Trissur.
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13.	*Naganandam*	1931	Sundarayyar & Sons, Trissur.
14.	*Poonilav*	1932	Viswanath, Trissur.
15.	*Premachandran*	1956	P.K.Brothers, Callicut.
16.	*Bheeshmar*	1934	Bharatavilasam, Trissur.
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18.	*Ratnadeepam*	1933	"
19.	*Rangamandapam*	1956	P.K.Brothers, Callicut.
20.	*Veeraradhana*	1942	Tagore Books, Trissur.
22.	*Sasirekhaparinayam*	1950	Vidyabhivardhini, Kollam.
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3.	*Dharmarajyam*	1935	Lalaji Smaraka Vayanasala, Kochi.
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6.	*Parayi Petta Panthirukulam.*	1955	P.K.Brothers, Callicut.
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8.	*Ramabai*	1954	Prakasakaumudi, Calicut.
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10.	*Rajasthanasimham*	1940	Educational Supplies, Palakkad.
11.	*Veeraprathijna*	1953	P.K.Brothers, Calicut.
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Autobiography

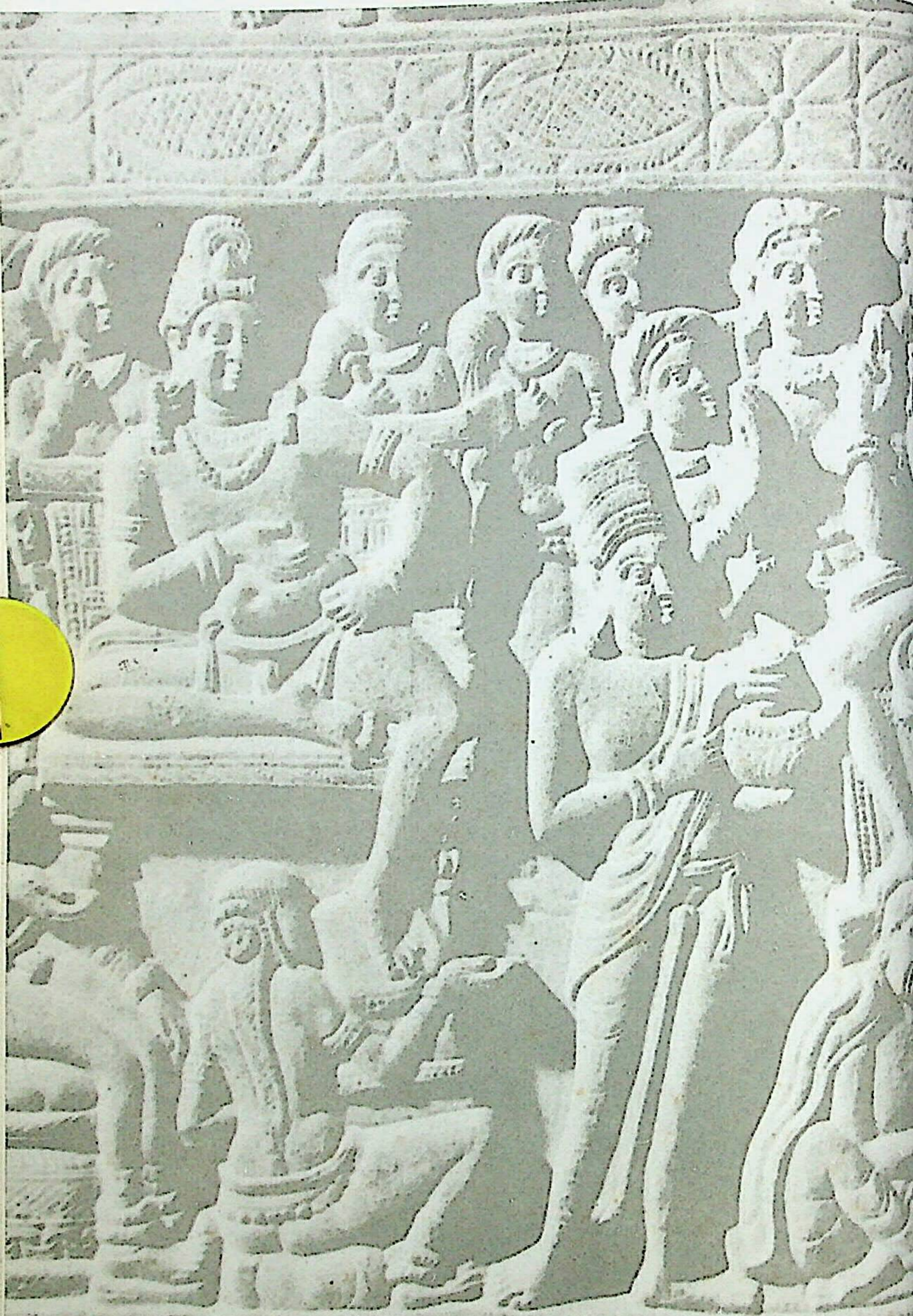
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Supplement 4
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Kunjiraman Nair Kavita	Prof. Melath Chandrasekharan
Piyude Pranayapapangal	Alankode Leelakrishnan
Vazhv Enna Peruvazhi	N. Gopalakrishnan
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Kairaliyude Katha	N. Krishna Pillai
Mahakavi P.	P. Shashtipoorthi Aghosha Committee
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For **P. Kunjiraman Nair** (1906 - 1978) poetry itself was life. The main themes of his poems are nature, love and devotion to God. His poems brim with the nostalgia of the expatriate that is at once delicious and melancholy. He was perhaps the first poet in Malayalam to make use of abstract imagery. He attributes human character to natural phenomena and brings them to vibrant life. Right through his poetry one comes across a tinge of regret about wrongs done to persons known and unknown. Even while regretting, the poet in him displays a strong inclination to persist in the wrong path and an urge to make a sacrifice of himself. He was able to maintain a lofty spirituality in his poems even while he immersed himself in sensual pleasures.

Kaliyachchan, Thamarathoni, Pookalam, Udayaragam, Prathibhankuram, Vicharaviharam (essays) Kaviyude Kalpadukal, Ennethirayunna Njan, and *Nithyakanyakayethedi* are his major works.

P.M. Narayanan born in Moothoor, Malappuram district of Kerala, is a famous writer and an accomplished translator. *Why ?, Football, Thadakam (poems) Swathathryam Enna Sapam, Who am I ?, Manushya Bandham Enna Prasnam* and *Sri Radha* (both translations) are his major works.

N. Gopalakrishnan (1934 -) is a well known writer in Malayalam and translator as well. *Vazhvu Enna Peruvazhi, Nammal Vazhum Kalam, Peruvazhiyile Nadakangal DC Enna Dominic Chako Insider What the Sufi Said* and *Sri Radha* are his major works. Sri Radha, originally in Oriya by Ramakant Rath is translated by Sri P.M. Narayanan and Sri N.Gopalakrishnan, in collaboration, into Malayalam received the Sahitya Akademi Award for translation for 2006.

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